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ABSTRACT

A statewide teacher survey was used to obtain data for an investigation of learning in the primary grades in Maryland schools. Teachers in 85 schools in 23 of Maryland's 24 school systems were surveyed. A total of 808, or 97 percent, of the teachers of kindergarten through third grade classes responded. The survey addressed the following topics: (1) early learning program goals; (2) the organization of early learning programs; (3) equitable opportunities for all children; (4) content of teaching and learning; (5) delivery of instruction; (6) the process of responding to individual differences; (7) assessment of children's development and school performance; (8) circumstances surrounding teaching in early learning programs; (9) family involvement; (10) program evaluation and improvement; and (11) factors that promote or impede children's school success. This eight-part report discusses the rationale for the study, methodology, findings, statistical data, recurrent themes, general patterns, and program success. Since the study was intended to describe early learning policies and practices in the state as a whole, the findings supply only a good approximation of how early learning programs function in individual schools. Although no overall conclusions are drawn, common practices and policies regarding learning, teaching, parental involvement, evaluation, and the promotion of success in learning are reported. A list of elements of appropriate and effective programs for children in kindergarten through third grade is appended. Contains 100 references. (LB)

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EARLY LEARNING PROGRAM POLICIES AND PRACTICES:

A Synthesis of Findings from a Statewide Teacher Survey

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Language Development and Early Learning Branch

Division of Instruction

Maryland State Department of Education

December 1989

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I. INTRODUCTION

During each stage of development from birth to maturity, personal goals, biological demands, and societal pressures converge, leading to the attainment of specific skills or tasks. These tasks are important milestones in the quest for competence. They enable individuals to benefit from experiences appropriate to their current level of development. They also lay the foundation for the developmental tasks that lie ahead.

From birth to age eight, the period referred to as early childhood or the early learning years, the critical tasks of development include acquiring the disposition to learn, mastering fundamental skills in reading, writing, and arithmetic, and developing a strong sense of self-worth that encompasses respect and compassion for others (Erikson). Children who attain these tasks when they should be attained move into later childhood and early adolescence with a high probability for success. Children who fail to attain the tasks when they should be attained move into the middle learning years with the odds stacked against them.

At least half of the period of early childhood is spent in school. The early elementary grades are highly influential in shaping children's views of themselves and others, promoting their mastery of basic skills, and nourishing their inclination to learn. The primary grades, because of their centrality in children's lives, have a powerful impact on what they become.

Many adolescents who bear children commit crimes, and/or drop out of school, have a history of poor school performance that is evident as early as third grade. For these adolescents, the effects of school failure, beginning at an early age, are cyclical and cumulative (Loeber and Dishion, Robins, Stroup and Robins). Failing to master what should be mastered results in an erosion of self-esteem. Failing to succeed in learning coupled with low self-esteem results in school misconduct. Failing to be able to control any of the conditions for school success leads to a disinterest in learning. Ultimately, the expectation that school can be neither rewarding nor satisfying leads to external sources of gratification that are often age inappropriate and socially unacceptable (Schorr, Within Our Reach, pp. 221-223).

If a significant number of children are to be diverted from a course of low achievement, low self-esteem, and low expectations that is evident as early as third grade, then, even before third grade, conditions must be created in which they can succeed. The early grades must operate on the basic premise that all children can learn, but learn differently and learn different things at different times and rates. The early grades must require a high level of performance from all children, but in ways that are responsive to their developmental and individual characteristics. They should be of uniformly high quality in all schools statewide.

In September 1986, then Secretary of Education, William J. Bennett issued a status report on elementary education in the United States. Entitled First Lessons: A Report On Elementary Education In America, the report described policies and practices surrounding the education of our country's youngest students. One conclusion drawn in the report was that elementary education "is in pretty good shape" and "is not threatened by a rising tide of mediocrity" (p. 65). The report also pointed out that examples of outstanding schools are too few, the number of satisfactory institutions not numerous enough, and the norm or average not high enough. According to Bennett, elementary education "can and must improve if it is to provide a strong foundation for all that we need to construct atop it (Ibid)."

While First Lessons placed the burden of responsibility for school reform on the "community of adults", in general, other reports issued during the decade of the eighties clearly defined the role of the state in bringing about educational improvement. In A Place Called School (1983), for example, John Goodlad charged states with the responsibility of continuously assessing the condition of education in schools and providing support for school improvement. The May 1983 report by the Task Force on Education For Economic Growth recommended that states, led by their governors, develop and implement statewide plans for improving public school education from kindergarten through grade 12.

States have accepted the challenge and responsibility for improving public education. This is evidenced by two recent reports by state governors and/or their representatives. The Governors' 1991 Report On Education called for states to collect factual information on the processes and outcomes of schooling and use such information to measure the progress in achieving educational goals. The Report of the Governor's Commission On School Performance recommended, among other things, that the Maryland State Department of Education develop a system to collect and report factual information about schools, school systems, and the state on a "vital core" of student attainments and establish a statewide improvement program that would ensure that each child in Maryland attended a school where she or he could learn Governor's Commission on School Performance, August 1989).

If the state is to take the lead in improving schools it needs far more information than data on student achievement alone can provide. Since learner outcomes are inextricably tied to school inputs and processes, the state must also gather information about schools themselves and the things that go on inside them. Without such knowledge, well-intentioned plans for improvement, based on false assumptions about the processes of schooling, may fail to change things for the better.

This report summarizes the results of an investigation into the primary grades of school. The investigation was motivated solely by the desire to know what school is like for Maryland's youngest students. The investigation was based on the premise that knowing what is may make it easier for policymakers to recommend what should be.

Teachers were selected as the sources of information for the investigation for several reasons. First, they are closest to the clients of early learning programs -- the children. They are thus in the best position to assess whether policies and practices are sensible and realistic in terms of program goals and young children's developmental characteristics. Secondly, behind the closed doors of their classrooms, teachers often nullify and diffuse policies and practices that conflict with their prevailing ways of doing things (Goodlad, Dynamics of Educational Change, p. 44). Teachers are thus in the best position to describe what early learning programs are *really* like. Finally, teachers are ultimately held accountable for children's progress. They should, therefore, be involved in identifying what works and in determining which policies and practices facilitate or hinder children's development. Teachers should have an integral role in helping policymakers make wise decisions about the current strengths and future directions of public school programs for the state's youngest students.

II. METHODOLOGY

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study was undertaken in order to build a data base for examining the condition of early learning programs in Maryland's public schools. Toward that end, a plethora of information about the policies and practices that shape the educational process for children in kindergarten through third grade was collected. Teachers' views about those policies and practices were also assessed.

The study was open-ended and was not intended to prove or disprove any hypotheses about early learning programs in Maryland. Rather, it was intended to describe the diverse but interrelated elements that comprise primary education in the public schools. Data for the study were collected by means of teacher surveys. The survey addressed eleven major questions. They are:

1. What are the goals of early learning programs?
2. How are these early learning programs organized?
3. Do all children have equitable opportunities to benefit from their early school experiences?
4. What is the content of teaching and learning in the early grades?
5. How is instruction delivered? What methods are used to promote learning?
6. How are early learning programs differentiated to respond to individual differences?
7. How are children's development and school performance assessed?
8. What are the circumstances surrounding teaching in early learning programs?
9. How are children's families involved in the educational process?
10. How are early learning programs evaluated and improved?
11. Do early learning programs enable all children to succeed? What factors promote or impede children's school success?

2. SELECTION OF THE SAMPLE

The design of the study targeted teachers as the sources of information for developing a composite description of early learning programs. The population of potential respondents, therefore, consisted of all public school regular classroom teachers, kindergarten through third grade.

To select actual study participants, a modified stratified random sampling method was used. A combination of quota and proportionate cluster sampling methods which took into account the size and location of elementary schools throughout the state resulted in the random selection of 85 schools in 23 of Maryland's 24 school systems. In each selected school, all regular kindergarten through third grade teachers were identified as study participants.

The final list of 85 schools represented approximately 10 percent of the total number of public elementary schools in Maryland. The list included small schools with teaching principals located on the shores of the Chesapeake Bay and in the mountains of western Maryland. It included large schools with full-time principals and assistant principals serving the urban rich and inner city poor. It included schools that serve

suburban communities located in rural areas and urban communities located in suburban areas. As indicated in Chart 1, approximately two-thirds of the schools in the sample received Chapter I funds.

CHART 1
STATE SURVEY ON EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS, POLICIES, AND PRACTICES: PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS BY SCHOOL SYSTEM

Local School System	*No. of Schools*	*Percent Chapter I*	*No. of Teachers*
Allegany	3	100.0	26
Baltimore City	7	100.0	86
Baltimore County	8	33.0	80
Calvert	3	60.0	40
Caroline	2	100.0	17
Carroll	3	96.0	50
Cecil	3	100.0	32
Charles	5	68.6	35
Dorchester	2	100.0	13
Frederick	5	80.0	65
Garrett	3	65.0	20
Harford	3	13.0	36
Howard	4	50.0	44
Kent	2	100.0	14
Montgomery	4	0.0	43
Prince George's	6	37.8	37
Queen Anne's	2	38.2	34
St. Mary's	4	36.8	24
Somerset	3	93.3	15
Talbot	2	100.0	11
Washington	4	60.6	29
Wicomico	4	32.6	43
Worcester	3	69.8	43
TOTAL: 23	*85*	*64.3**	*837*

**Average*

3. *DEVELOPMENT OF THE SURVEY FORMS*

Data for the study was collected by means of a teacher survey that took five alternate forms. Items on the surveys evolved from an initial list of 500 questions that were developed by Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) specialists. The questions were categorized under the eleven areas to be examined, the number was reduced, and the revised list reviewed by teacher teams in two schools that were not part of the randomly selected sample. Based on teacher input, some questions were modified, others deleted, and still others added. The outcome was a final list of 245 questions.

With the assistance of MSDE's Office of Management Information Systems (OMIS), the questions were converted to survey items. Five survey forms, each containing 77 items were then developed. In development of the surveys, careful attention was given to the following four criteria:

1) each survey form had to be comprised of a set of related items organized in such a way that it was comprehensible to the respondent,

2) the majority of items had to be in a machine scorable format,

3) each survey form had to be able to be completed by the respondent in approximately twenty minutes, and

4) the language, content, and format of each survey form had to be sufficiently interesting to encourage a response to each item and ensure completion of the total instrument.

To assess the reliability and generalizability of responses, a core of 35 Likert-scaled items was included on all five forms. The additional 42 items on each form varied as did their response format which was multiple choice, multiple response, or ranked response, and/or open-ended questions. To ensure the inclusion of the core items as well as equivalent sets of relevant items on each survey form, an elaborate matrix design was used. The matrix design emphasized form equivalence. It also stressed appropriateness and interrelatedness of items within each form.

Before being distributed to study participants, all five alternate forms of the survey were field tested in three schools that were themselves not part of the study sample. Feedback about the format, items, and ease of completion was obtained from teachers. Minor revisions were made in two of the five forms.

4. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

In March 1987 the surveys were distributed to the early childhood supervisor in each participating school system who, in turn, distributed them to and collected them from teachers in pre-selected schools. Within each school, all regular classroom teachers, kindergarten through third grade, were asked to respond. Altogether 837 teachers received surveys.

Early childhood supervisors returned teachers' completed survey forms to MSDE by June 1987. Chart 2 shows the response rate by grade level. It indicates that 808 or 97 percent of teachers responded to the survey. Among respondents, 19 taught split grades and 8 reported that the level they taught was non-graded.

CHART 2
TEACHER RESPONDENTS TO THE MSDE SURVEY ON EARLY LEARNING PROGRAM POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Grade	*No. of Respondents*
K	150
1	235
1-2 split	11
2	205
2-3 split	8
3	193
Nongraded	6
Total	***808***

Prior to dissemination of the surveys, a master plan was developed to ensure equitable distribution of the five forms within schools and grades. The plan assigned the different forms of the survey to teachers by grade level. The result, as indicated in Chart 3, was a closely balanced set of responses to the five forms of the survey.

CHART 3
NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS BY GRADE LEVEL
TO THE FIVE FORMS OF THE SURVEY

Survey Form	*No. of Respondents*	*Respondents By Grade*						
		K	*1*	*1-2*	*2*	*2-3*	*3*	*Non-Graded*
01	162	27	49	7	42	6	28	3
02	167	22	48	3	43	2	47	2
03	162	32	47	1	39		42	1
04	158	33	47		42		36	
05	159	36	44		39		40	
Total	*808*	*150*	*235*	*11*	*205*	*8*	*193*	*6*

Data from the survey forms was analyzed by OMIS. Preliminary analyses consisted of the following:

- generating response pattern frequency tables,
- applying item analysis procedures to test for consistency of response patterns and reliability of item responses,
- conducting a reliability assessment across forms using the 35 core items, and
- conducting reliability and consistency assessments across forms using category (or question) related items.

After ensuring the reliability and validity of responses, analyses of the results were conducted. In the analyses, teachers' responses to items on different forms of the surveys were aggregated and the findings for each sub-sample were treated as being representative of the sample as a whole. The complete analysis included the following procedures:

- aggregating responses into frequency distributions,
- analyzing data by grade level to investigate whether significant differences in policies and practices or views existed among grades,
- analyzing the responses of teachers in Chapter I and non-Chapter I schools to determine whether significant differences in policies and practices or views existed on the basis of Chapter I status,
- developing weighting procedures for items that were ranked, and
- classifying teachers' responses to open-ended items and identifying associative patterns.

5. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study was intended to gain insight into the inner workings of early learning programs in Maryland's public schools. Since the programs could not be studied "all of a piece" the study investigated the bits and pieces and compiled them into the unified whole. The whole, is a composite of the perceptions of only one of many groups of professionals who are involved in the delivery of early childhood education in the public schools. To that extent, it is biased; it tells the story from teachers' point of view.

In addition, the pictures of early learning programs that are drawn were obtained through self-reports from teachers. While it would have been ideal to check teachers' views and responses against classroom realities, neither time nor staff allowed for on-site observations or interviews. This resulting product, therefore, does not capture the totality of schooling for young children, just teachers' perceptions of that totality.

Finally, the study was intended to describe early learning policies and practices for the state as a whole. Insofar as each school is a unique entity, statewide policies and practices may manifest themselves differently and to different degrees. The findings are only a good approximation of how early learning programs function in individual schools. They describe commonalities among programs, but not the subtle differences that make each program unique.

6. ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

This report is organized into eight sections. The first section provides a rationale for the study. The second section describes the methodology. Sections III-VI present the findings, provide statistical data, and point out recurrent themes or general patterns. Section VII examines the success of Maryland's early learning programs. It not only offers some insight into how our youngest students are doing but, also, provides information about teachers' views of the ingredients of success and failure. The report concludes by summarizing policies and practices that characterize early learning programs in the state as a whole.

In reporting the results of the teacher survey every effort has been made to present the findings in a manner that enables the reader to obtain information easily and systematically. Sections III through VII of the report all have the same format. First, teachers' responses to survey items about early learning program policies and practices are presented. The findings are then synthesized in a synopsis. Second, teachers' responses to survey items that were intended to assess their views toward particular policies and practices are presented and those findings are summarized in a synopsis. Findings are reported by grade level or Chapter I and non-Chapter I schools only where significant differences in policies, practices, or views were found.

III. LEARNING IN KINDERGARTEN THROUGH THIRD GRADE

1. EARLY LEARNING PROGRAM GOALS

By clearly articulating the purposes for education in the primary grades, goals provide a common sense of direction for the providers of early learning programs. Program goals make explicit what is valued in terms of learners' development. They provide a framework for determining what children should learn and what learning should be assessed. Ten items on the teacher surveys were intended to obtain information about goals in early learning programs including their existence, focus, and appropriateness, and the extent of perceived congruence between teachers and school administrators with regard to what the goals of early learning programs should be.

POLICIES AND PRACTICES RELATED TO PROGRAM GOALS

CHART 4
TEACHERS' REPORTS ABOUT THE STATUS OF GOALS IN THEIR EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS

Survey Item		*Frequency of Response*					
	N	*Agree*		*Disagree*		*No Response*	
		N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*
This school has goals and objectives that clearly state the purposes for education in the primary grades.	808	704	87.1	97	12.0	7	.8
This school's goals and objectives for its early learning program are clearly stated in writing.	162	134	82.8	27	16.7	1	.6
I have been informed about the school's goals for its early learning program.	167	144	86.2	23	13.8	-	
At the beginning of each school year, I am informed about the goals of special programs in which primary grade children may participate, for example, Chapter I and the Extended Elementary Education Program.	162	115	71.0	40	24.7	7	4.3
Within the last three years, staff in this school have examined the appropriateness of early learning program goals in light of recent research and/or trends in the field.	159	10	6.2	149	93.8	-	
This school has recently assessed children's attainment of program goals using concrete data.	162	98	60.3	64	39.7	-	

- To what extent were you involved in developing the goals of the early learning program? (N=158)

A Great Deal		*Some*		*Very Little/ Not At All*	
N	%	N	%	N	%
0	-	2	1.3	156	98.7

Synopsis

Although teachers' involvement in developing goals for their early learning programs was non-existent, 87 percent indicated that their schools had goals that identified the purposes for education in the primary grades. Eighty-six percent of teachers reported that they had been informed of the goals. A lower percentage had been informed of the goals of supplementary programs. Only 71 percent of teachers, for example, indicated that the goals of such programs as Chapter I and/or the Extended Elementary Education Program (EEEP) had been communicated to them.

Sixty percent reported that their schools had recently assessed children's attainment of program goals. In contrast, only six percent indicated that their schools had recently examined the appropriateness of the goals in light of recent research and/or trends in the field. Statewide, therefore, it seems to be a more common practice for schools to assess children's attainment of program goals than for them to examine or question the goals themselves.

TEACHERS' VIEWS OF POLICIES AND PRACTICES RELATED TO PROGRAM GOALS

- In view of your knowledge of child growth and development and early childhood education, which of the following describes the goals of your early learning program?

Goal Descriptor	Frequency of Response (N=162)			
	Agree		Disagree	
	N	%	N	%
They are appropriate	99	61.1	63	38.9
They are reasonable	97	59.9	65	40.1
They are attainable	113	69.7	49	30.3
They are responsive to children with a broad range of experiences, interests, and abilities	90	55.6	72	44.4

- At the grade level I teach, program goals emphasize cognitive development and academic learning over physical, social, and creative development.

Grade		Frequency of Response			
		Agree		Disagree	
	N	N	%	N	%
K*	33	16	51.6	10	32.2
1	47	18	38.3	29	61.7
2	42	13	30.1	29	69.0
3	36	11	30.6	25	69.4
Total	***158***	***58***	***40.4***	***93***	***59.6***

*No Response = 7 (4.4%)

- What should the goals of early learning programs be?

CHART 5
TEACHERS' OWN VIEWS AND THEIR VIEWS OF WHAT THEIR PRINCIPALS BELIEVE THE GOALS OF EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS SHOULD BE

Goals	*Teachers' Ranking of Their Own Goals Rank*	*Teachers' Ranking of Their Principal's Goals Rank*
To help children acquire basic skills in language arts and mathematics	3	2
To help children become critical thinkers and problem solvers	4	5
To help children learn to use language to meet their own needs and to communicate effectively with others	7	7
To develop creativity in thought and expression	10	10
To develop an appreciation for and interest in the arts	13	13
To promote physical development and good health	12	12
To help children find satisfaction and success in learning	2	1
To help children learn to value and strive for excellence	8	6
To help children learn to live and work cooperatively with others	6	4
To help children acquire independence, self-reliance, and initiative	5	8
To build character through self-discipline and respect for authority	9	9
To help children develop a positive self-concept	1	3
To help children acquire basic moral values	11	11

Synopsis

The fact that early learning program goals seem to have been developed without teacher input may partly account for the concerns teachers had about them. While 70 percent of teachers agreed that the goals were attainable, only about 60 percent felt that they were appropriate or reasonable. Less than 56 percent of teachers indicated that the goals enabled them to be responsive to the broad range of children they teach.

Significant differences were found in teachers' perceptions of whether or not program goals focused on the development of the whole child. The lower the grade, the higher the percentage of teachers who indicated that program goals were narrowly focused on "academic" learning. Almost fifty-two percent of kindergarten

teachers indicated that program goals emphasized cognitive development over development in the physical, social, and/or artistic/creative domains. This view was shared by 38 percent of first grade and 30 percent of second and third grade teachers.

Teachers believe that they agree with their school administrators on what the most important goals of early learning programs should be. However, the order in which teachers thought their principals would rank the goals varied slightly. In rank order from first to third, teachers felt that the most important goals of early learning programs should be to help children develop a positive self-concept, to help children find satisfaction and success in learning, and to help them acquire basic language and math skills. Teachers indicated that their principals' would rank satisfaction and success in learning as most important with the acquisition of basic skills next. According to teachers, principals would rank helping children develop a positive self-concept third.

Teachers believed that their school administrators would agree with them about what is least important for early learning programs to attain. Least important program goals would include helping children acquire basic moral values, developing children's interest in and appreciation for the arts, and promoting children's health and physical development.

2. THE ORGANIZATION OF EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS

Organization refers to how children are grouped for teaching and learning. On the surface, an organizational strategy is merely a necessary arrangement by means of which schools systematically manage diverse populations of students. However, an organizational strategy is based on certain assumptions about learners and can have far-reaching implications in terms of learner outcomes.

Dividing children into grades by age, for example, rests on two assumptions. The first is that all children of the same age are at a similar level developmentally. The second is that at each grade level there is a predetermined and finite set of knowledge, skills, and competencies to which all children should be introduced. Organizing by grade can have potentially negative consequences for children who are developmentally "younger" or more precocious than their peers. It can also have deleterious effects on children who fail to meet the performance expectations of their grade.

Ability grouping within classes is based on the premise that instruction can be more responsive to individual needs when the range of accomplishment levels among children is reduced. While this may or may not be the case, there is always the danger that ability groups will become permanent tracks that lead to differential and unequal educational opportunities for children. Eight items on the teacher surveys provided information about the organization, of early learning programs, including their perceived effectiveness and impact.

ORGANIZATIONAL POLICIES AND PRACTICES

- How are 5-8 year-old children in your school organized?

Organizational Strategy	Frequency of Response (N=808)	
	N	%
In grades with heterogeneous classes	665	82.3
In grades with homogeneous classes	108	13.4
In non-graded groups by ability	6	.7
In departmentalized grades; each teacher provides instruction in particular content areas	10	1.2
Split grades, for example, K-1, 1-2, 2-3	19	3.0

- In which of the content areas listed below do you always provide ***total group*** instruction?

Content Area	Frequency of Response (N=158)	
	N	%
Reading	14	8.9
Language (oral and written expression)	58	36.7
Spelling	56	35.7
Handwriting	111	70.2
Mathematics	60	38.0
Social Studies/Science	139	88.0
Art and/or Music	136	86.1

- When I group children, I do so on the basis of ability.

Total=808

Agree	N=744	92.1%
Disagree	N=62	7.7%
No Response	N=2	.2%

- How are children grouped for reading?

Grouping Strategy	Frequency of Response (N=158)	
	N	%
In 3 groups, by ability	93	57.4
In 4 groups or more, by ability	86	16.8
In heterogeneous ability groups, by skill needs	9	5.5
Following total group instruction, in ability groups for skill application	12	7.7
Following total group instruction, in "re-teach" and enrichment groups based on skill mastery	7	4.5
*Other	15	9.2

*10 of 15 respondents taught kindergarten. No respondents indicated what the "other" consisted of.

Synopsis

Approximately 96 percent of all teachers indicated that their schools organized children by grade. Within grades, heterogeneous classes are the norm.

Within classrooms, children are most frequently grouped for reading, language, and mathematics, and least frequently grouped for social studies, science, and the arts. When children are grouped, 92 percent of teachers indicated that groups are formed on the basis of ability. Almost three-fourths reported that their reading groups are ability-based.

TEACHERS' VIEWS OF ORGANIZATIONAL POLICIES AND PRACTICES

CHART 6
TEACHERS' VIEWS OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES USED IN THEIR EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS

Survey Item		Frequency of Response					
	N	Agree		Disagree		No Response	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
The way in which young children in this school are organized enables me to effectively meet their needs.	808	471	58.3	194	24.1	143	17.7
The way in which 5-8 year-old children in this school are organized facilitates their learning as much and as fast as they are able.	158	115	72.3	43	27.2	--	
My reading and math groups usually do not change membership during the school year.	158	28	17.7	124	78.5	6	3.8
In this school, most of the same children are in the same ability groups from year to year.	159	100	62.9	48	30.2	11	7.0

Synopsis

Fifty-eight percent of teachers felt that the organization of their early learning programs enabled them to effectively meet their students' needs. Approximately one-fourth indicated that the organizational strategies did not enable them to effectively do so, and 18 percent did not respond. However, 72 percent of teachers felt that the organization of their programs enabled children to learn as much and as fast as they are able.

Approximately 78 percent of teachers in one sub-sample reported that grouping in their classrooms was flexible; learners' membership in groups changed throughout the year. In another sub-sample, 63 percent of teachers reported that most of the same children are in the same ability groups from one year to the next.

3. *EQUITY AND OPPORTUNITY*

A major issue in early learning programs is whether all children have equal opportunities to benefit from schooling. Research has shown that, in the primary grades, class size, the allocation of time, and teacher expectations all have a significant impact on children's opportunity to learn. These three variables have the potential to create inequitable learning conditions that lead to differential achievement outcomes for children.

While there is moderate agreement among researchers that class size has only a marginal influence on the instructional process (Raiche, 1983), in his critical examination of conclusions that have been drawn about the effects of class size, Cacha (1982) argues that the extent of its influence is dependent upon learner characteristics and content area. According to Cacha, class size makes a difference in basic skill areas, in the primary grades, and for children from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Weldon, Loewy, Winer, and Elkin further found that classroom density, as defined by square footage of space per learner and learner-teacher ratio, has a significant impact on the effectiveness of particular instructional methods. Low density is critical for self-initiated/independent learning to be effective. It facilitates active learning and enables the teacher to interact with students on an individual basis.

Allocated time can also have a significant effect on children's opportunity to learn. The basic premise is that the more time children spend learning something, the better their grasp of it. However, the path between the amount of time allocated to learning in particular content areas and learner outcomes is not necessarily direct. Allocated time creates the opportunity for ***the potential to learn.*** Within allocated time blocks, the extent to which children are ***actively engaged*** in learning influences what is learned.

Finally, teacher expectations have a significant impact on the extent to which children have equitable opportunities to benefit from schooling. Teacher expectations influence children's views of themselves which, in turn, influences what they learn. As a variable that has a very important effect on learning, teacher expectations can influence children's opportunities in two ways. First, they can effect achievement outcomes for all children in a class. If a teacher does not have developmentally appropriately high expectations for children's performance to begin with, then as a group, children may not achieve up to their developmental capabilities.

Second, teacher expectations can lead to differential achievement outcomes for children within a class. If a teacher ascribes ability on the basis of factors such as race, dialect, and physical attractiveness, then children who are identified "low ability" and "high ability" tend to perform in a manner that is consistent with the label that has been applied to them. In this case, teacher biases from the outset can lead to inequitable outcomes in achievement. Eleven items on the teacher surveys provided information about the variability in class size, time allocations, and teacher expectations in early learning programs across the state.

POLICIES AND PRACTICES RELATED TO CLASS SIZE

- How many children are in your class?

CHART 7
FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF CLASS SIZE
BY GRADE LEVEL
(N=162)

Grade	*No. of Teachers*	*Class Size*						
		10-15	*16-20*	*21-25*	*26-30*	*31-35*	*35-40*	*41-45*
K	39	3	2	19	9	3	2	1
1	44	1	7	20	9	5	2	
2	38		2	16	13	4	3	
3	37		1	21	5	7	3	
1-2 Split	3			1	1	1		
2-3 Split	1					1		

Synopsis

There appears to be a wide variation in class size in early learning programs throughout the state. Although the most frequently occurring class size at all non-split grade levels was 21-25, the range of class size decreased as grade level increased. At the kindergarten level, class size ranged from 11-41 with the average being 23. In first grade, class size ranged from 13 to 36 with an average of 23. In second and third grades, the average class size was approximately the same as for kindergarten and first grade. The range was from 17 to 37 for grade one and 19 to 37 for grade two.

POLICIES AND PRACTICES RELATED TO ALLOCATED TIME

- How is the time in your instructional day allocated?

CHART 8
DAILY TIME ALLOCATIONS
IN KINDERGARTEN BY CONTENT AREA
(N=31)

Content Area	*Time Allocations in Minutes**		
	Average	*Minimum*	*Maximu*
Language Arts	70	40	90
Math	20	15	60
Social Studies/Science	20	10	45
The Arts	10	0	20
Physical Education/ Physical Activity	15	0	20

*Excludes Full-Day Kindergarten.

CHART 9
DAILY TIME ALLOCATIONS
IN GRADES 1-3 BY CONTENT AREA
(N=158)

Content Area	*Time Allocations in Minutes*		
	Average	*Minimum*	*Maximum*
Language Arts	140	90	180
Math	45	30	90
Social Studies/Science	40	15	60
The Arts	30	0	75
Physical Education/ Physical Activity	30	0	45

Synopsis

Teachers' responses indicate there is wide variation in the way in which instructional time is allocated. Generally, time allocations reflect what teachers feel are the most and least important goals for early learning programs. In kindergarten, the amount of time allocated to "the basics" (language arts and mathematics) ranged from 55 to 150 minutes, with the average being 90 minutes or 55 percent of an average program day.

In contrast, the amount of time allocated to physical development and the arts ranged form none to 40 minutes, with the average being 25 minutes or approximately 15 percent of an average program day.

In first through third grades, the amount of time allocated to the "basics" ranged from 2 to 4 1/2 hours with the average being approximately 3 hours or 47 percent of an average program day. In contrast, the amount of time allocated to physical development and the arts ranged from none to two hours, with the average being one hour or 15 percent of an average program day.

Teachers' reports of content area time allocations need to be cautiously considered. Since content is integrated in some early learning programs, the demarcations between subject areas are not well-defined. For example, music may be integrated with language arts or science, but children may not study music as a separate subject. In addition, local school systems often calculate required time allocations on a weekly basis. As a result, children may have a 40 minute music period twice a week and no experiences in music the other three days.

POLICIES AND PRACTICES RELATED TO TIME ALLOCATIONS

CHART 10
INFRINGEMENTS ON TIME ALLOCATED TO INSTRUCTION

Survey Item		Frequency of Response					
	N	Agree		Disagree		No Response	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
In my classroom there are few, if any, interruptions during the instructional day.	159	74	46.5	83	52.2	2	1.3
I allocate 10 percent or more of each instructional day to routine activities such as taking attendance, distributing supplies, transitions, and bathroom.	162	122	76.5	40	24.7	--	
My regular instructional program frequently competes for time with other activities such as celebrating holidays and other special days, preparing for assemblies and special programs, and testing.	167	107	64.1	59	35.3	1	.6

- I spend a great deal of time reprimanding children, bringing them back on task, and/or reminding them of classroom rules.

Grade		Frequency of Response (N=162)			
	N	Agree		Disagree	
		N	%	N	%
K	35	12	34.3	23	65.7
1	46	18	39.1	28	60.1
2	42	21	50.0	21	50.0
3	33	25	75.7	8	24.2
Total	**156**	**76**	**48.7**	**80**	**51.3**

No Response = 6 (3.7%)

Synopsis

Findings in regard to infringements on the time allocated to teaching and learning suggest that they are the norm in many classrooms. Approximately 76 percent of teachers indicated that they allocate 10 percent or more of their daily instructional time to routine activities such as distributing supplies, taking attendance, and taking children to the bathroom. Sixty-four percent indicated that their instructional programs frequently compete with special activities such as celebrating holidays, prepared for assemblies, and testing. Only 46 percent of a sub-sample agreed that there are few, if any, infringements on the time allocated to instruction.

Managing children seemed to limit opportunities for learning with increasing frequency as grade level increased. While only 34 percent of kindergarten teachers reported spending a great deal of time reprimanding children, bringing them back on task, and/or reminding them of classroom rules, 39 percent of first grade teachers, 50 percent of second grade teachers, and 76 percent of third grade teachers reported doing so.

POLICIES AND PRACTICES RELATED TO TEACHER EXPECTATIONS

- I believe that I am primarily responsible for what my students learn and their success in learning it.

  Total=808

Agree	N=772	95.5%
Disagree	N=33	4.1%
No Response	N=3	.4%

- I have the same expectations for all the children I teach.

  Total=158

Agree	N=60	38.0%
Disagree	N=98	62.0%

- I expect more of some children than of others.

  Total=162

Agree	N=140	86.4%
Disagree	N=20	12.3%
No Response	N=2	1.2%

- I have high expectations for all the children I teach.

School Type	N	Frequency of Response (N=162)			
		Agree		Disagree	
		N	%	N	%
Chapter I	519	401	77.6	113	21.9
Non-Chapter I	289	263	91.6	24	8.4
Total	***808***	***664***	***82.6***	***137***	***17.4***

No Response=4 (.5%)

- I expect 95-100% of the children in my class to meet grade level expectations.

School Type	N	Frequency of Response (N=162)			
		Agree		Disagree	
		N	%	N	%
Chapter I	65	24	36.9	41	63.1
Non-Chapter I	97	61	62.9	36	37.1
Total	***162***	***85***	***52.5***	***77***	***47.5***

Synopsis

Almost all teachers believed that they are responsible for what children learn. However, more teachers in non-Chapter I schools reported having holding high expectations for their students than teachers in Chapter I schools. For example, 92 percent of teachers in non-Chapter I schools indicated having high expectations for their students' performance. In contrast, only 78 percent of teachers in Chapter I schools felt that their expectations for children were high.

Teachers in Chapter I and non-Chapter I schools also differed in the extent to which they expected children to meet grade level expectations. Among teachers in non-Chapter I schools, 63 percent expected 95-100 percent of their students to meet the expectations of their grade level. Among teachers in Chapter I schools, only 34 percent expected children to meet grade level expectations.

Most teachers indicated having different expectations for different children. Nearly three-fourths of 320 teachers reported that their expectations for children differed. Eighty-six percent of teachers reported that they expect more of some children than of others.

4. THE CURRICULUM

Curriculum refers to the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and ways of feeling that the program intends for children to acquire. A curriculum, or syllabus of learning, should be aligned with program goals and coordinated across grade levels so that children's learning is continuous. It should be organized so that those who use it can readily identify what is essential for children to learn. Furthermore, achievement of program goals depends in part, on the systematic presentation of curriculum content. Teachers should use the curriculum as the basis for instructional activities in the classroom. Unless publishers' teacher's guides have been aligned with the curriculum, they should be used only as references. Six items on the surveys provided information about local school system curricula including their scope, sequence, and extent of use.

CURRICULUM POLICIES AND PRACTICES

- I have been informed of the goals and subgoals that are delineated in the Maryland State Department of Education's curricular frameworks.

  Total=159

Agree	N=97	61.0%
Disagree	N=56	35.2%
No Response	N=3	1.8%

- In which of the content areas identified below does your school system have a written curriculum of your grade level?

Content Area		Frequency of Response	
	N	N	%
Language Arts	159	133	84.2
Mathematics	162	145	89.5
Social Studies	167	142	85.0
Science	167	142	85.0
Music	162	91	56.2
Art	162	91	56.2
Physical Education	159	88	55.3
Thinking Skills	159	103	64.8

- In which of the content areas identified below is the curriculum organized as a hierarchy of learning that provides continuity and sequence across grade levels?

Content Area		Frequency of Response	
	N	N	%
Language Arts	162	106	65.4
Mathematics	158	114	72.2

- For the content areas listed below, what do you use to identify objectives for teaching and learning?

Content Area		Basis For Instructional Decisions				
		LSS Curriculum			Teacher's Guides	
	N	N	%		N	%
Reading	158	145	91.8		123	77.8
Mathematics	162	138	85.2		119	73.4
Social Studies/Science	167	136	81.4		57	34.1

Synopsis

According to most teachers, local school system curricula have been developed for the language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science. Slightly over half of surveyed teachers indicated that systemwide curricula also define what is to be taught or learned in art, music, and physical education. The majority of teachers further indicated their school systems' curricula are coordinated across grade levels.

Curriculum guides, are not teachers' sole source for making instructional decisions. Ninety-two percent of teachers indicated using the school system's curriculum as the basis for identifying objectives in reading. At the same time, 78 percent reported that they also use the teacher's guide that accompanies the basal reading series. Similarly, 85 percent of teachers reported using their school system's curriculum to make instructional decisions in math. Seventy-three percent also indicated that they use the teacher's guide that accompanies the textbook series in math.

TEACHERS' VIEWS OF CURRICULUM POLICIES AND PRACTICES

- How do you view your school system's curricula?

Teacher's View	Frequency of Response (N=167) N	%
As the total content to be covered each year	47	28.1
As minimum competencies to which all children must be exposed	92	55.1
As minimum competencies which all children must master	35	21.0
As competencies to be taught when and if children are ready	57	34.1
As competencies to be taught whether children are ready or not	23	13.8

- This school system's curriculum guides contain so many skills and information that it is often difficult to identify what is essential.

Total=808

Agree	N=426	52.7%
Disagree	N=365	45.2%
No Response	N=17	2.1%

Synopsis

Teachers' responses indicated confusion and lack of certainty about how their school system's curriculum is to be used. A majority of teachers agreed that the curriculum does not define the total content of learning each year. According to a little over half, the curriculum does define the minimum content to which all children should be exposed. Policies and practices related to curriculum implementation seemed particularly unclear to teachers. Teachers seemed confused about whether children should merely be exposed to or master the competencies in the curriculum, when children should be exposed to the competencies in the curriculum, and which curriculum competencies were critical for children to learn.

5. PLACEMENT, PACING, AND CONTINUOUS PROGRESS

One of the critical issues in early childhood education is whether children are expected to "fit" the program or whether the program enables the teacher to begin where each child is and take him (her) as far as (s)he can go. The way in which children are initially placed in the curriculum and paced through it are two

indicators for determining the extent to which programs are responsive to children. Placement and pacing also become equity issues when they lead to differential opportunities for access to knowledge. Teachers who spend a great deal of time reviewing what children already know limit children's opportunity to learn. In early childhood programs in which learning predominantly occurs through direct instruction, the rate at which new learning is introduced places a cap on what children can potentially learn. Seven items on the surveys provided information about the extent to which children's learning is continuous.

POLICIES AND PRACTICES RELATED TO CONTINUITY OF LEARNING

CHART 11
POLICIES AND PRACTICES
RELATED TO CONTINUOUS PROGRESS

Survey Item		*Frequency of Response*					
	N	*Agree*		*Disagree*		*No Response*	
		N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*
At the beginning of each school year, I start all children at the same place in the curriculum.	808	242	30.0	549	67.9	17	2.1
At the beginning of each school year, I start my students at different places in the curriculum.	162	110	67.9	36	22.2	16	9.9
My students move through the curriculum at the same rate.	167	29	17.4	122	73.1	16	9.6
The pace at which my students learn is predominantly determined by their interests, ability, and success.	808	725	89.7	82	10.1	1	.1
The pace at which my students learn is predominantly determined by schoolwide timelines.	162	31	19.1	121	74.7	10	6.2
I spend a great deal of time thoroughly reviewing previously taught content before introducing new material.	158	120	75.9	36	22.8	2	1.3
I skip skills and competencies in the curriculum that children already know.	162	97	59.9	61	37.6	4	2.5

Synopsis

Thirty percent of teachers indicated that they start their students at the same place in the curriculum. Sixty-eight percent reported that they start children at different places. These findings reflect a statewide tendency to accommodate early learning programs to children. The tendency is corroborated by findings related to pacing. Only 18 percent of two sub-samples reported that they pace children through the curriculum at the same rate or in accordance with school or systemwide timelines. In contrast, 90 percent of teachers agreed that the pace at which their students move is determined by their students' interests, abilities, and success in learning.

Sixty percent of a sub-sample indicated that they skip skills and competencies in the curriculum that children already know. Seventy-six percent of another sub-sample indicated that they spend a "great deal" of time reviewing previously taught material before introducing new learning. These findings suggest that, while many teachers avoid duplication of learning they spend a great deal of time finding out what doesn't need to be duplicated. This thoroughness may be viewed as a form of redundancy that results in a slowing down of the continuous learning process.

6. LEARNING IN DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE WAYS

Learning refers to the way in which knowledge, skills, dispositions, and feelings are accumulated and integrated into the cognitive structures of the individual. Learning style refers to the manner in which learning is acquired. To a great extent, development defines the style of learning that is a necessary condition for learning.

Until around the age of eight, children's developmental characteristics include incomplete differentiation of the developmental domains, thinking first in generalities and then, if at all, in specifics, reasoning on the basis of sensory perception and intuition, mixing the real with the imagined, and movement in the direction of coordination and control. Children's developmental characteristics dictate the way in which they learn. Their learning style is best described as active, holistic, and experiential.

Children learn from whole to part and "all of a piece". For example, they learn to read, write, and speak altogether and they learn about reading and writing before they learn the skills of which reading and writing are comprised. Children also learn by interacting with materials and people. They construct knowledge in the process of exploring, manipulating, creating, dismantling, and reconstructing things. They revise and correct their thinking in the process of communicating their ideas to others, having their ideas challenged, and listening to other's ideas. In order for the early grades to maximize children's learning, the methods used must be compatible with children's learning style. This requires that early learning programs use an integrated approach to learning, concrete materials as vehicles for learning, and social interaction as the process of learning. Six items in the surveys provided information that can be used to determine whether children in the early elementary grades are learning in developmentally appropriate ways.

POLICIES AND PRACTICES RELATED TO DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE LEARNING

- Which of the areas listed below do you teach as separate subjects?

Content Area	*Frequency of Response*		
	N	*N*	*%*
Reading	167	126	75.4
Phonics	167	25	15.2
Writing	167	109	65.4
Handwriting	167	98	58.9
Spelling	167	80	48.1
Mathematics	167	133	79.4
Science/Social Studies	158	107	67.7
Art	158	68	43.0
Music	158	75	47.5
Physical Education	158	82	51.9

- Implementation of the school system's curriculum requires my using an integrated approach.

  Total=167

Agree	N=146	87.4%
Disagree	N=17	10.2%
No Response	N=4	2.4%

CHART 12
HOW CHILDREN IN THE EARLY GRADES LEARN

Survey Item		*Frequency of Response*					
	N	*Agree*		*Disagree*		*No Response*	
		N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*
My students acquire knowledge and skills through concrete experiences with people and things.	158	145	91.7	12	7.6	1	.6
My students have many opportunities to learn through exploration, experimentation, and risk-taking.	162	140	86.4	19	11.7	3	1.8
My students have opportunities to learn through collaboration with their peers.	162	87	53.7	75	46.3	–	–

- Most of the tasks on which my students work are of the pencil and paper variety.

Grade	*N*	*Frequency of Response*			
		Agree		*Disagree*	
		N	*%*	*N*	*%*
K	32	10	31.2	19	59.4
1	47	20	42.5	27	57.5
2	44	30	68.2	14	32.8
3	35	22	62.9	12	34.3
Total	*158*	*82*	*52.9*	*42*	*45.6*

No Response=4 (2.5%)

- My students have many opportunities throughout the day to learn through discussion and conversation with their peers.

Grade	*N*	*Frequency of Response*			
		Agree		*Disagree*	
		N	*%*	*N*	*%*
K	36	30	90.1	3	8.3
1	44	32	72.7	12	27.3
2	39	22	56.4	16	41.0
3	40	22	55.0	17	42.5
Total	*159*	*106*	*66.7*	*48*	*30.2*

No Response=7 (4.4%)

- My students are free to discuss their work with one another during independent work periods.

Grade	N	Frequency of Response			
		Agree		Disagree	
		N	%	N	%
K	32	28	86.7	4	13.3
1	47	24	51.1	23	48.9
2	44	23	52.3	11	47.7
3	35	18	53.0	16	47.0
Total	***158***	**93**	**58.7**	**52**	**32.9**

No Response=13 (8.2%)

Synopsis

Although 87 percent of teachers indicated that implementation of the curriculum requires an integrated approach, when asked to identify those areas that are taught separately, approximately two-thirds identified reading, writing, mathematics, social studies, and science. Particularly interesting is the high percentage of teachers who divided reading and writing, or spelling, handwriting, and writing into separate subjects of study. Teachers' responses suggest that the use of an integrated approach, while perceived as being required, is not widely practiced in early learning programs across the state.

The majority of teachers in a sub-sample agreed that their students learn through concrete experience. However, the extent to which this actually seemed to be the case varied by grade level. As grade level increased, experiential learning decreased. By second grade, according to the teachers who were surveyed, learning for many children is dominated by pencil and paper tasks.

Although solitary learning does not seem to be the norm in early learning programs it characterizes far too many classrooms. A little over half of teachers agreed that their students have many opportunities to learn in collaboration with their peers. Nearly 70 percent also reported that their students have opportunities to learn through conversation and discussion with their peers. However, learning as a social activity seems to be more common in kindergarten than at any subsequent grade level.

7. LEARNING BY INSTRUCTION

Instruction is the deliberate act of attempting to impart knowledge, skills, dispositions, and ways of feeling. Research has shown that direct instruction is an educationally effective tool at all grade levels. In the early grades, it is most appropriate when integrated with an experience-based program. Since young children are experiential learners, direct instruction should never replace direct interaction with people and things as the primary method of learning. The methods used to provide direct instruction itself should facilitate children's active and interactive learning.

Whatever children are told is understood in direct proportion to the sum of their related experiences. What children learn by listening is in direct proportion to their interests and/or need to know. In the early grades, direct instruction should be delivered in small doses and should be tied to children's current needs and experiences. It should enable children to use what was learned to attain personally relevant goals.

Direct instruction should not place limits on what children can learn, nor should it limit children's view of what learning is all about. When direct instruction is the primary method used to promote learning, the

pace of which skills are introduced determines what children can learn. When direct instruction is the primary method used for learning, children may equate teaching with learning and draw the erroneous conclusion that learning is something that is done in school with the teacher, rather than something that is an integral part of life for which they share responsibility.

In the early years, direct instruction should enable children to be smart in many ways. According to Howard Gardner in Frames of Mind, intelligence is not a single entity but, a set of entities that include linguistic, spatial, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinesthetic, and personal and social intelligences. Since children are constructing the major foundations of their intelligences during early childhood, direct instruction should not be narrowly focused on academic skills. Instead, it should build children's competencies in all domains of development/intelligence. Thirty-three items on the teacher survey provided information about the methods, materials, and emphases of instruction in language arts, mathematics, social studies and science, physical education, and the arts.

POLICIES AND PRACTICES RELATED TO LANGUAGE ARTS INSTRUCTION

- During the instructional day, my students spend as much time reading as they do receiving instruction in reading-related skills.

Grade	N	Frequency of Response			
		Agree		Disagree	
		N	%	N	%
K	31	13	41.9	18	58.1
1	42	21	50.0	21	50.1
2	46	25	54.3	21	45.7
3	37	26	70.2	11	29.8
Total	***156***	***85***	***54.5***	***71***	***45.5***

No Response N=6 (3.7%)

- During reading instruction, I spend more time on phonics than on reading for comprehension.

Grade	N	Frequency of Response			
		Agree		Disagree	
		N	%	N	%
K	28	16	57.1	12	51.6
1	44	24	32.6	30	67.4
2	42	9	27.3	33	78.6
3	33	–	0.0	33	100.0
Total	***147***	***39***	***26.5***	***108***	***73.5***

No Response N=15 (9.2%)

CHART 13
METHODS, MATERIALS, AND EMPHASES IN THE LANGUAGE ARTS

Survey Item		Frequency of Response					
	N	Agree		Disagree		No Response	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
I use and cover the stories in a basal reading program in a sequential manner.	158	114	72.1	23	14.6	21	13.3
It takes me about 10-12 weeks to cover the material in a pre-primer.*	81	34	42.0	29	35.8	18	22.2
I read or tell children stories everyday.	158	114	72.1	23	14.6	21	13.3
During writing instruction, I focus on mechanics and spelling rather than content and fluency.	158	16	10.1	125	79.1	17	10.8
My students have many opportunities to choose their own topics/purposes for writing.	162	111	68.5	36	32.4	15	9.3
My students have many opportunities to write for purposes similar to those for which people write in the real world.	167	127	76.0	33	20.0	7	4.1
When assessing children's writing, I focus on content and fluency rather than mechanics and spelling.	162	115	71.0	31	19.1	16	9.9
My students have frequent opportunities to check books out of the school library.	162	127	78.4	26	16.1	9	5.5

*Responses for first and second grade teachers only.

- How many times per week do your students receive library as a resource?

Times Per Week	Frequency of Response (N=167)	
	N	%
0	31	18.6
1	109	65.3
2	27	16.2

Synopsis

According to 54 percent of surveyed teachers, the focus of the reading program is on skill-teaching. This focus decreases as children move through the primary grades with more emphasis placed on independent reading by grade 3. A similar shift is noted in the attention given to phonics with the switch in emphasis from phonics to comprehension beginning at grade 1.

Seventy-two percent of teachers indicated that reading is taught by introducing children to the stories in basal readers in a sequential manner. Among teachers who use a basal program and teach beginning readers, 42 percent agreed that it takes them 2 1/2 to 3 months to cover the material in a pre-primer. Given

that many basal reading series consist of three pre-primers, one primer, and a first reader, many months could conceivably pass before a child is ever introduced to a first reader.

Most primary grade teachers provide children with opportunities to read or be read to on a regular basis. Seventy-two percent agreed that they read or tell children stories everyday. Seventy-eight percent reported that their students have frequent opportunities to check books out of the school library.

Findings about the methods used to develop children's competencies as writers suggest that the use of a process approach is fairly prevalent in the early grades. Almost 80 percent teachers indicated that they emphasize content and fluency over mechanics and spelling. Almost 70 percent agreed that their students choose their own topics for writing. Seventy-six percent indicated that their students have many opportunities to write for purposes similar to those for which people write in the world-at-large.

POLICIES AND PRACTICES RELATED TO INSTRUCTION IN MATH, SOCIAL STUDIES, AND SCIENCE

- In which of the activities below are your students engaged three or more times each week during independent practice in mathematics? Mark all that apply.

Type of Activity	Frequency of Response (N=167)	
	N	%
Workbook/Textbook Assignments	120	71.9
Boardwork/Dittoes	113	67.7
Small group projects (assigned)	14	8.4
Individual projects (assigned)	35	21.0
Child-selected activities	43	25.7
Other	0	–

- Circle the letters next to the two methods that you use most frequently to teach social studies and science.

Method	Frequency of Response (N=167)	
	N	%
Direct instruction	128	81.0
Independent reading assignments	4	2.4
Class discussion	73	43.7
Small group projects	31	18.6
Child-selected projects	49	29.3

- Circle the letter next to the three types of materials that you use most frequently during social studies and science.

Resource	Frequency of Response (N=158)	
	N	%
Trade books	35	22.2
Textbooks	70	44.3
Concrete Objects	78	49.4
Films, filmstrips, pictures	128	81.0
Television	16	10.1
Records	9	5.7
Speakers	11	6.9

Synopsis

Young students primarily learn mathematics by completing written assignments. Although almost half of teachers indicated that they introduce social studies and science concepts through the use of concrete materials, the findings suggest that children are more likely to learn social studies and science concepts vicariously -- through direct instruction supplemented with films, filmstrips, and pictures. The overall findings suggest a paucity of activities that facilitate interactive or discovery learning, require individual planning and execution of a project, and/or that encourage children to work together in a cooperative manner.

POLICIES AND PRACTICES RELATED TO INSTRUCTION IN ART AND MUSIC

- In which of the music activities listed below have you engaged your students six or more times this year?

Activity	Frequency of Response (N=167)	
	N	%
Singing	113	67.7
Playing and/or making musical instruments	18	10.8
Dancing, creative movement	53	31.7
Rehearsing for programs	65	38.9
Studying music theory	3	1.8
Music appreciation	38	22.8
Other	--	--

- In which of the art activities listed below have you engaged your students six or more times this year?

Activity	Frequency of Response (N=167)	
	N	%
Crayon drawing, cutting and pasting	138	85.2
Exploring art methods and materials	60	37.0
Reproducing adult-made art models	44	27.2
Free expression	57	35.2
Crafts	61	37.7
Art appreciation	14	8.6
Other	–	–

- How many times per week do your students receive art and music from a resource teacher?

Times Per Week	Frequency of Response (N=167)			
	Art		Music	
	N	%	N	%
0	48	28.7	26	15.0
1	99	59.3	79	47.3
2	19	11.4	57	34.1
3	1	0.6	5	3.0

Synopsis

The amount of attention teachers give to music and art reflects the low priority placed on the arts and creative expression as goals for early learning programs. Music in primary grade classrooms consists mostly of singing with children provided few opportunities to express themselves aesthetically or through movement, or to acquire an appreciation for music as a natural and customary form of self-expression. Similarly, art consists mostly of coloring, and cutting and pasting, with children provided limited opportunities to explore art methods and materials, learn about the methods and works of great artists, or use art to express their ideas and feelings.

Although classroom teachers provide children limited experiences in the arts, art and music as resources are an integral part of most early learning programs. Seventy-one percent of teachers reported that their students receive art from a resource teacher at least once a week. Eighty-five percent indicated that their students receive music from a resource teachers as frequently.

POLICIES AND PRACTICES RELATED TO PHYSICAL EDUCATION INSTRUCTION

- About how much time do you allocate to physical activity, including recess, each day?

Number of Minutes	Frequency of Response (N=167)	
	N	%
0	27	16.2
5-15	59	35.3
16-30	72	43.1
31-45	5	3.0
More than 45	4	2.4

- In what kinds of physical activities have you engaged your students ten or more times this year?

Activity	Frequency of Response (N=158)	
	N	%
Physical fitness/Endurance activities	39	24.5
Team sports and games	58	36.5
Motor coordination/agility activities	40	25.2
Indoor recreation (free choice)	90	56.6
Outdoor free play (supervised)	88	55.3

- How many times per week do your students receive physical education from a resource teacher?

Times Per Week	Frequency of Response (N=167)	
	N	%
0	19	11.4
1	41	24.6
2	84	50.3
3	18	10.7
4-5	5	3.0

Synopsis

The amount of time teachers allocate to physical education reflects the low priority teachers assign to children's physical development as a goal for early learning programs. The five to thirty minutes that 78 percent of teachers indicated they allocate to physical activity each day is most likely to take the form of indoor recreation or outdoor play with little emphasis placed on the development of physical skills or abilities. However, 89 percent of teachers reported that their students receive physical education from a resource teacher. Within this group, sixty-four percent indicated that physical education as a resource was provided at least twice a week.

POLICIES AND PRACTICES REGARDING THE USE OF COMPUTERS

- Computers are regularly available to my students to assist them with learning.

Grade	N	Frequency of Response			
		Agree		Disagree	
		N	%	N	%
K	31	7	24.6	23	74.2
1-3	136	85	62.8	42	30.9
Total	*167*	*92*	*55.1*	*75*	*44.9*

Synopsis

Computer-assisted instruction is not yet common practice in early learning programs. Over twice as many first through third grade teachers reported that they had access to computers than did kindergarten teachers. Sixty-three percent of first through third grade teachers reported using computers as an instructional aid.

8. SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING

For young learners, experience is the best teacher. In order to become self-initiating, responsible, and creative individuals who are capable of coping with environmental demands and challenges, children need ample opportunities to practice independence, self-direction, and personal accountability beginning early in their school careers. Learning by instruction, therefore, should be balanced with teacher-supported self-directed learning that includes planning one's own learning, carrying out the plan, and evaluating both the plan and the end result. Six items on the teacher surveys provided insight into the extent to which the primary grades enable children to engage in self-directed learning.

CHART 14
TEACHERS' REPORTS ABOUT THE USE OF SELF-INITIATED LEARNING

Survey Item		*Frequency of Response*					
	N	*Agree*		*Disagree*		*No Response*	
		N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*
The instructional program at my grade level is flexible enough to enable children to pose their own questions for learning and to explore areas of personal interest.	158	100	63.3	58	36.7	--	
My students have many opportunities to participate in planning their own learning.	158	57	36.1	101	63.9	--	
My students have many opportunities to choose their own methods and/or materials for learning.	162	65	40.1	90	55.6	6	3.7
My students have many opportunities to participate in evaluating their own learning.	159	135	84.9	20	12.6	4	2.5
At the grade level I teach, teacher-directed instruction dominates each child's day.	162	131	80.1	29	17.9	2	1.2
At the grade level I teach, children spend much of the day listening to and following directions.	162	111	68.5	47	29.0	4	2.5

Synopsis

The findings suggest that early learning programs are dominated by teacher-directed activity and direct instruction. That children have limited opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning, under adult guidance and with adult support, is indicated by the low percentage of teachers who acknowledged that their students have opportunities to plan their own learning and/or to choose the methods or materials for carrying out their learning plans.

9. *RESPONDING TO INDIVIDUAL NEEDS AND DIFFERENCES*

Children come to school differing on a number of individual and background variables that influence their classroom performance. The role of the teacher is to match program experiences and resources to individual strengths and needs in order to promote each child's capabilities and ameliorate areas that are weak. While teachers must guarantee all children ***consistency of treatment,*** differences among children require that teachers differentiate the program so that all children have ***equitable opportunities*** for school and individual success.

Making early learning programs responsive to individual needs and differences can often be a formidable task for two reasons. First, in Maryland, there are three entry points to school: prekindergarten, kindergarten, and first grade. Prekindergarten is not universally provided and kindergarten attendance is

not required. Consequently, primary grade classrooms are likely to be comprised of children with broad backgrounds of experience. The broadest range is in first grade where some children may have already been in structured educational programs for at least two years, while others may not have had any prior school experience whatsoever.

The second factor that creates a challenge is the grade level program organization in which expectations for performance are defined on a yearly basis. This organization is not necessarily compatible with development which proceeds at its own rate in spurts and plateaus. Primary grade classrooms are likely to be comprised of perfectly "normal" children operating at a broad range of developmental levels. Particularly problematical is the child whose development is proceeding more slowly and is thus, *developmentally* incapable of handling grade level expectations. How does a first grade teacher reconcile system expectations for children's performance with the limitations imposed by development without penalizing children for factors beyond their control?

In addition to differentiating the educational program to respond to differences among children, being responsive to individual needs requires the provision of more comprehensive services. Such services address social, psychological, and physical needs that influence performance in the classroom. While they need not be school-based, they should be available to children when needed and as often as needed. Twelve items on the surveys provided information about the way in which early learning programs respond to individual needs and differences.

POLICIES AND PRACTICES RELATED TO THE IDENTIFICATION OF DIFFERENCES

- How are more and less able children in your class identified?

Means of Identification	Individual Difference			
	More Able (N=159)		Less Able (N=162)	
	N	%	N	%
Observation of Children	91	57.2	106	65.4
Classroom Performance (Products)	93	58.5	75	46.2
Achievement Tests	97	61.0	77	47.5
Intelligence Tests	60	37.7	49	30.2
Aptitude Tests	34	21.4	40	24.7
Screening (EIIP)*			17	10.5
Other	10	6.3	16	9.9

*Results reported for the responses of kindergarten teachers only. (N=31)

Synopsis

Teachers gave multiple responses to this question, suggesting that a number of different measures are used to identify individual differences. Approximately 60 percent used a combination of classroom performance measures and achievement tests to identify more able/more advanced children. Children with learning problems were most likely to be identified on the basis of teacher observation.

POLICIES AND PRACTICES RELATED TO DIFFERENTIATED PROGRAMMING

- What organizational methods are used to meet the needs of more able children?

Organizational Method	Frequency of Response (N=158)	
	N	%
Acceleration (skipping grades)	14	8.9
Nongraded programming	17	10.8
Ability grouping in the classroom	109	69.0
Flexible grouping; classroom enrichment	101	63.9
Special classes; pull-out programs	54	34.2
Other	2	1.3

- What organizational methods are used to meet the needs of children with learning problems?

Organizational Method	Frequency of Response (N=167)	
	N	%
Transitional classes	21	12.6
Retention	94	56.3
Nongraded programming	4	2.4
Ability grouping in the classroom	134	80.2
Flexible grouping; re-teaching in the classroom	109	65.3
Remedial classes, pull-out programs	126	75.4
Other	2	1.2

- What supplementary services are provided to meet the needs of more able children?

Supplementary Service	Frequency of Service Per Week (N=159)					
	Never		Once		Two or More	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Reading Resource Teacher	127	79.9	9	5.7	12	7.5
Math Resource Teacher	142	89.3	3	1.9	3	1.9
Chapter I Teacher	131	82.4	4	2.5	16	10.1
Teacher Assistant	104	65.4	8	5.0	40	25.1
Parent Volunteers	74	46.5	21	13.2	55	34.6
Computers	97	61.0	23	14.5	28	17.6
Gifted and Talented Teacher	107	67.3	15	9.4	14	8.8

- What resources are provided to meet the needs of children with learning problems?

Resource	Frequency of Service Per Week (N=159)					
	Never		Once		Two or More	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Reading Resource Teacher	76	47.8	1	.6	66	41.5
Math Resource Teacher	117	73.6	6	3.8	29	18.2
Chapter I Teacher	86	54.1	5	3.1	59	37.1
Teacher Assistant	81	50.9	6	3.8	70	44.0
Parent Volunteers	59	37.1	25	15.7	70	44.0
Computers	100	62.9	24	15.1	27	17.0

- Which of the statements below accurately describes the pull-out programs in which your children participate?

CHART 15
PULL-OUT PROGRAM POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Survey Item		Frequency of Response					
	N	Agree		Disagree		No Response	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Instruction in pull-out programs is coordinated with regular classroom instruction.	162	105	64.8	32	19.8	25	15.4
The instructional methods used by resource teachers are the same as those that I use.	162	81	50.0	49	30.2	32	19.8
I meet regularly with resource teachers to discuss the impact of the resource on my students' progress.	167	102	61.0	58	34.8	7	4.2

Synopsis

Ability grouping within the classroom is used most often by teachers to respond to individual differences among children. While approximately two-thirds of teachers reported that they also use more flexible grouping with enrichment and re-teaching as needed, children with learning problems were far more likely than more able children to be assigned to remedial classes that pull them out of the regular classroom program.

Few human or material resources were available to help teachers challenge more able/more advanced children. About half of teachers reported that they rely on parent volunteers, but even then, only one third used parent volunteers two or more times a week. A wider variety of resources were available, on a more frequent basis, to help teachers meet the needs of children with learning problems. Still, paraprofessional and non-professional resources outranked professional services in number and frequency of provision. While 42 percent of teachers, for example, reported that reading resource teachers provided a support to children with learning problems, 48 percent indicated that teacher assistants offer support, and 60 percent reported that parent volunteers do so. According to teachers, paraprofessionals and parent volunteers also provided support to children with learning problems on a more frequent basis than professionals.

Nearly two-thirds of teachers reported that instruction in pull-out programs is coordinated with instruction in the regular classroom program. Interestingly, 50 percent indicated that the instructional methods are the same.

TEACHERS' VIEWS OF POLICIES AND PRACTICES REGARDING DIFFERENTIATED PROGRAMMING

- The program in this school is organized so that I can readily meet the needs of and challenge the more able children in my classroom.

  Total=158

Agree	N=120	75.9%
Disagree	N=35	22.1%
No Response	N=3	1.9%

- The program in this school is organized so that I can readily meet the needs of the children in my classroom who have learning problems.

  Total=162

Agree	N=109	67.3%
Disagree	N=53	32.7%

Synopsis

A majority of teachers felt that their early learning programs enable them to effectively meet the needs of more able children and children with learning problems. Seventy-six percent indicated that the program enabled them to challenge more advanced children. Sixty-seven percent agreed that they could effectively address the needs of children with learning problems.

POLICIES AND PRACTICES RELATED TO COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAMMING

- What auxiliary services are available to children who need them as often as they need them?

Ancillary Service	Available If Needed (N=162)		Available to the Extent Needed (N=162)	
	N	%	N	%
ESOL Teacher	59	36.4	36	22.2
Speech Clinician	149	92.0	112	69.1
Psychologist	121	74.7	49	30.2
Guidance Counselor	81	50.0	58	35.8
Social Worker/Home Visitor	98	60.5	52	32.1
Parent Worker	82	50.6	39	24.0
Attendance Monitor	55	34.0	50	30.9
School Nurse	101	62.3	66	40.7
Hearing Screening	141	87.0	73	45.1
Vision Screening	138	85.2	71	43.8

Synopsis

Teachers gave multiple responses suggesting that a number of different health and social services are available to children and their families. Student health services, including those for speech, hearing, vision, and mental health are most prevalent, and more likely to be available when needed than family support services. Very few auxiliary services are available to the extent that teachers feel that they are needed. According to teachers, the most needed services, include ESOL teachers, parent workers, psychologists, and attendance monitors.

10. ASSESSING YOUNG LEARNERS' DEVELOPMENT

Screening Children For Learning Programs

The Early Identification and Intervention Program (EIIP) was developed to help local school systems meet their legal requirement to evaluate all children who enter the primary grades in a public school for the first time for learning problems. The EIIP process has three phases: screening, review and evaluation, and intervention.

Screening is based on teacher observation using the Maryland Observation Screening Checklist (MOSCK) as a guide. Teachers observe children's classroom performance over an eight-month period and use the checklist to indicate whether children have attained particular developmental abilities that are associated with future school success. According to psychometric standards, in order for the MOSCK to be viewed as a trustworthy screening instrument, its reliability and predictive validity must be clearly established.

The only purpose for screening is to sort children into two groups: those whose classroom performance is suggestive of behavior associated with learning problems and those whose classroom performance is not. The only appropriate use for screening results, therefore, is to recommend "at-risk" children for further review and evaluation. The MOSCK is not intended to identify children's individual strengths and weaknesses. Screening results should not be used to make curricular decisions or decisions about the placement of individual children.

The early identification and intervention process enables schools to address and ameliorate learners' deficiencies before they result in school failure. Once a child's particular problems have been identified, the Educational Management Team (EMT) works with the classroom teacher to plan intervention strategies. The EMT and classroom teacher should monitor the effectiveness of the interventions in ameliorating children's learning problems. They should also review the progress of at-risk children on a regular and systematic basis. Six items on the teacher surveys provided insight into how the Early Identification and Intervention Program operates at the local school level.

EIIP POLICIES AND PRACTICES

- I have been informed about the purposes for and procedures involved in implementing the Early Identification and Intervention Program.

Grade	N	Frequency of Response			
		Agree		Disagree	
		N	%	N	%
K	36	36	100.0	0	0.0
1	48	38	84.8	10	20.8
2	33	24	72.7	6	18.2
3	41	27	65.8	15	36.6
Total	***158***	***125***	***79.1***	***31***	***19.6***

No Response N=2 (1.3%)

- At the beginning of each school year, I review children's records to identify those students in my class who are at-risk for learning problems.

Grade	N	Frequency of Response			
		Agree		Disagree	
		N	%	N	%
1	48	24	50.0	24	50.0
2	43	30	69.8	13	30.2
3	47	29	62.2	18	38.8
Total	***138***	***83***	***60.1***	***55***	***39.9***

- What is the nature of your involvement with the Early Identification and Intervention Program?

Nature of Involvement	Frequency of Response (N=159)	
	N	%
I am expected to implement the interventions that were recommended by the Educational Management Team for each at-risk student.	34	21.4
I monitor the effects of the interventions on the at-risk students in my class.	37	23.3
I meet periodically with the Educational Management team to discuss the impact of the interventions on the at-risk students in my class.	39	66.1
At the end of each school year I meet with teachers who will receive my at-risk students to discuss their progress and needs.	34	21.4

- For which of the purposes listed below do you use EIIP screening results?

Use	Frequency of Responses		
	N*	N	%
To identify instructional priorities	38	7	18.4
To develop curriculum objectives	38	4	10.6
To identify children's specific strengths and weaknesses	38	28	73.7
To identify children who might benefit from a modified educational program	38	13	34.2
To recommend retention	33	7	21.2
To identify children who need further assessment	33	11	33.3
To recommend placement in a transitional program	33	2	6.1
For Chapter I identification	33	16	48.5
To recommend special education services	33	5	15.1

*Only kindergarten teachers responding.

Synopsis

The extent to which teachers reported being informed about the Early Identification and Intervention Program varied significantly, with increasing percentages reporting being uninformed as grade level increased. At kindergarten, the level at which most children are screened, all teachers indicated that they had been informed about the program. Although kindergarten teachers acknowledged that they knew about the purposes for and procedures involved in implementing EIIP, a surprising percentage failed to use the screening results for purposes for which they are intended. Only one-third indicated that they use the results to recommend children for further assessment. On the other hand, nearly three-fourths used the results to identify children's particular strengths and weaknesses.

Depending on grade level, about 50-60 percent of teachers checked their students' records at the beginning of each school year to identify those who are at-risk on the basis of EIIP screening. A similar percentage indicated that they meet with the Educational Management Team to discuss the progress of their at-risk students. However, only about 21 percent of teachers thought that they are expected to implement the interventions prescribed by the EMT and/or monitor the effects of the interventions on the progress of their at-risk students.

TEACHERS' VIEWS OF EIIP POLICIES AND PRACTICES

- The Educational Management Team provides me with appropriate and realistic strategies for addressing the needs of the at-risk students in my class.

Total=158

Agree	N=76	48.1%
Disagree	N=71	44.9%
No Response	N=11	7.0%

- The Educational Management Team provides me with timely information for meeting the needs of the at-risk students in my class.

  Total=159

Agree	N=70	44.0%
Disagree	N=36	22.6%
No Response	N=53	33.3%

Synopsis

Teachers have mixed views about the interventions the EMT recommends. Forty-eight percent agreed that the EMT's recommended interventions are realistic and appropriate; 45 percent disagreed. Forty-four percent of teachers agreed that the EMT recommend interventions in a timely manner. Twenty-three percent disagreed. One-third of the teachers who were surveyed did not respond.

Assessing Children's Classroom Performance

Assessment practices in the early elementary grades should be age appropriate. Insofar as all aspects of young children's development affect their school performance, assessment strategies should provide information about each child's social, emotional, and physical development, as well as his/or her intellectual development and academic performance. Since young children are not paper and pencil test takers, assessment should primarily involve observing each child's classroom performance, listening to each child as (s)he explains his or her thoughts and ideas, and compiling a portfolio of each child's products. Pencil and paper tests should be used on a limited basis and then, only to assess children's progress in mastering essential objectives for learning.

Young children should be compared to themselves, but not to each other. The only legitimate reasons for assessing young learners are to plan an age and individually appropriate learning program and to improve the program that is planned. In order to fulfill both purposes, the assessment should mirror what children are exposed to in terms of both content and process. In effect, there should be a three-way match between program goals and objectives, curriculum, and assessment. Twelve items on the teacher surveys provided information about assessment practices in early learning program classrooms.

POLICIES AND PRACTICES RELATED TO CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT

CHART 16
CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

Survey Item		*Frequency of Response*					
	N	*Agree*		*Disagree*		*No Response*	
		N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*
My assessments of children focus on their academic performance not their total development.	162	36	22.2	126	77.8	–	
My observations and judgements play little or no role in assessing my student's performance and progress.	158	10	6.3	144	91.1	3	2.5
Systemwide tests are available to teachers at my grade level for use in assessing children's mastery of key curricular objectives.	159	74	46.5	53	33.3	32	20.1
The tests that I administer to children are matched to the curriculum.	162	123	75.9	28	17.3	11	6.8
I use criterion-referenced tests to assess children's mastery of curriculum objectives.	162	103	63.6	40	24.7	19	11.7
This school (system) has developed objectives for teachers to use in judging young learners' performance.	159	51	32.9	93	60.0	15	9.4
In this school, the criteria for judging children's performance are at different levels.	162	101	62.3	42	25.9	19	11.1
My students know the criteria by which their performance will be judged.	167	146	87.4	3	1.8	20	11.9

- In what curricular areas listed do you administer tests?

CHART 17
AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM
IN WHICH CHILDREN ARE TESTED

Content Area	Administer A Pre-Test				Administer A Post-Test			
	K (N=33)		Gr 1-3 (N-129)		K (N=28)		Gr 1-3 (N=124)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Concept Development	21	63.6	39	30.2	18	64.3	27	56.2
Reading Readiness	3	9.0	51	39.5	3	10.1	14	29.2
Reading Comprehension	3	9.0	96	74.4	4	14.3	105	84.7
Reading: Vocabulary	2	6.1	95	73.6	3	10.1	99	79.8
Reading: Phonics	3	9.0	102	79.1	7	25.0	88	71.0
Language: Usage	0	–	60	46.5	4	14.3	79	63.7
Writing: Mechanics & Fluency	0	–	27	20.1	0	–	43	34.7
Spelling	0	–	11	8.5	0	–	82	66.1
Mathematics	11	25.0	114	88.4	9	35.7	111	89.5
Social Studies	0	–	12	9.3	0	–	46	37.1

No Response=10 (6.2%)

- What methods did you use to determine children's reading placement in September? (N=158)

Method	*Rank*
Recommendations from the preceding year's teacher	1
Teacher-made inventory	2
Individual reading inventory	3
Basal series placement tests	4
June report card reading level	6
Standardized test results	5
Other	7

- How do you use the results of the curriculum-related tests that you administer? (N=159)

Use	*Frequency of Response*	
	N	*%*
To match students to their appropriate entry levels in the curriculum	55	35.5
To identify each student's strengths and needs	127	81.9
To evaluate each student's mastery of curriculum objectives	85	54.8
To group for instruction	85	54.8
To plan or modify instruction	86	53.1
To identify children for Chapter I services	42	27.1
To make retention decisions	43	27.9
To make decisions about special education referrals	36	23.2
To assess the average achievement of the class	30	19.4

Synopsis

The findings suggest that teachers' assessments of children focus on their total development. Methods of assessment include observation and tests. Seventy-six percent of teachers reported that the tests they administer are matched to the curriculum. Sixty-four percent indicated that the tests are criterion-referenced.

The majority of teachers reported that their students know how their performance will be judged. Less than one-third indicated that their students are assessed against an objective set of criteria. Nearly two-thirds agreed that the criteria for judging young learners' performance are set at different levels. This finding may reflect a tendency among primary grade teachers to compare children to themselves.

Kindergarten teachers administer fewer tests less frequently than do first through third grade teachers. Kindergarten teachers are most likely to test children's knowledge of basic concepts on a pre- and post-basis. First through third grade teachers test children on just about everything related to the basics although they are somewhat more likely to administer post-tests than pretests. Those areas in which 66 percent or more of teachers indicated that they administer post-tests include reading comprehension, vocabulary, phonics, word usage, spelling, and mathematics. It is interesting to note that in spite of all the testing that is done in reading, teachers are almost twice as likely to rely on recommendations from the preceding year's teachers to make decisions about children's initial reading placement.

Almost 82 percent of teachers indicated that they use test results to identify students' strengths and needs. Beyond this widespread use, test results have a multitude of purposes. Approximately 54 percent of teachers reported that they use test results to group for instruction, modify instruction, and/or to assess students' mastery of curricular objectives.

USING CHILDREN'S TEST RESULTS

Norm-referenced tests yield little information that is useful for program planning or improvement. On one hand, they are frequently divorced from a local school system's curriculum, thus failing to measure the effects of the learning program. On the other hand, they compare children to other children of the same age or to other children at the same grade who took the test at the same time. Since young children's development is relatively unstable and there is a wide range of "typical" performance among perfectly normal children, norm-referenced tests results fail to provide the data that is most important -- how a learner is progressing in comparison to his or her own developmental capabilities. Two items on the teacher surveys showed how teachers use norm-referenced test results and provide insight into teachers' views of norm-referenced tests.

POLICIES AND PRACTICES RELATED TO THE USE OF STANDARDIZED TEST RESULTS

- How do you use "standardized" test results?

Use	Frequency of Response (N=159) N	%
To match students to their appropriate entry levels in the curriculum	40	25.6
To identify each student's strengths and needs	109	69.9
To evaluate each student's mastery of curriculum objectives	44	28.2
To group for instruction	53	34.0
To plan or modify instruction	54	34.6
To identify children for Chapter I services	111	71.1
To make retention decisions	22	14.1
To make decisions about special education referrals	41	26.3
To assess the average achievement of the class	13	8.3

Synopsis

Teachers use norm-referenced test results most frequently to identify students' strengths and needs and to determine students' eligibility for Chapter I services. Only about 35 percent of surveyed teachers indicated that they use the results from norm-referenced tests to make instructional decisions.

TEACHERS' VIEWS OF NORM-REFERENCED TESTS

- Which of the following statements accurately describes the "standardized" tests that are administered to your students?

Descriptor	Frequency of Response (N=159) N	%
They are a valid assessment of children's strengths and weaknesses	38	25.0
They are matched to the curriculum	23	15.1
They assess what children have been taught	30	19.7
They provide useful information for assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the primary program	66	43.4
They provide useful information for making instructional decisions	61	40.1
None of the above	24	15.8
Not applicable; standardized tests are not administered to students at my grade level	13	8.6

Synopsis

Teachers do not have positive views of norm-referenced tests. Only 43 percent thought that the tests provide useful information for assessing the primary program. Only 40 percent indicated that the tests provide useful information for making instructional decisions. Less than 20 percent agreed that the tests assess what children have been taught. Only about one-fourth felt that norm-referenced tests are a valid assessment of their students.

Assessing Young Learners

Assessment policies and practices should be minimally disruptive to the learning process. One teacher survey form contained an item that assessed teachers' views of student assessment requirements.

TEACHERS' VIEWS OF ASSESSMENT POLICIES AND PRACTICES

- At the grade level I teach, student assessment requirements detract from teaching and learning.

  Total=162

Agree	N=78	48.1%
Disagree	N=84	51.9%

Synopsis

Teachers were split in their views about assessment policies and practices. About half felt that student assessment detracts from teaching and learning. A little more than half felt that assessment requirements do not divert attention from the real purposes for early learning programs.

IV. TEACHING KINDERGARTEN THROUGH THIRD GRADE

1. BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS OF EARLY LEARNING PROGRAM TEACHERS

Qualified staff and a reasonable degree of staff stability are critical to the provision of an appropriate and effective early learning program. Five items on the surveys provided information about the background characteristics and professional status of kindergarten through third grade teachers, including their gender, educational backgrounds, levels of education, and professional experience.

BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS OF EARLY LEARNING PROGRAM TEACHERS

- What sex are you?

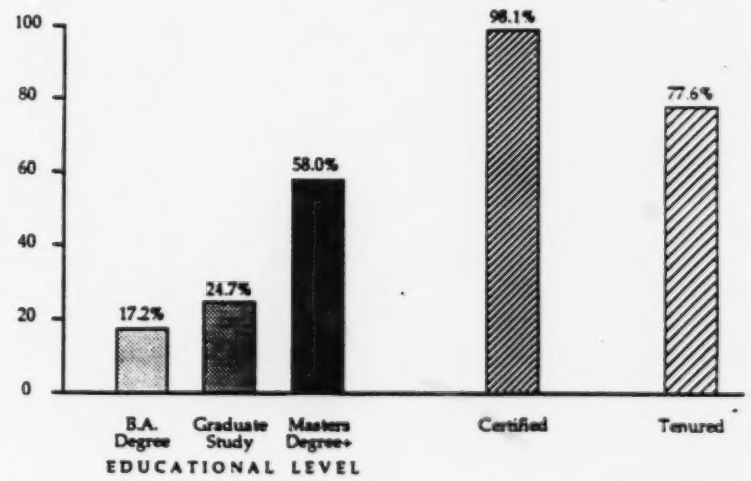
  N=808

Female	91.8%
Male	8.2%

- What is the highest level of education that you have completed? Are you certified to teach at your grade level? Are you a tenured teacher?

TABLE 1

QUALIFICATIONS OF EARLY LEARNING PROGRAM TEACHERS
(N=808)



- How many years of experience have you had as a teacher? At your current grade level? In your current school? In your current school system?

CHART 18
TEACHERS' REPORTS OF THEIR PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES
(N=808)

Type of Professional Experience	Years							
	1-2		3-5		6-10		11 or more	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Teacher	82	10.1	78	9.7	148	18.3	496	61.4
Teacher at Current Grade	224	27.7	172	21.3	169	20.9	241	29.8
Teacher in Current School	241	29.8	155	19.2	155	19.2	253	31.3
Teacher in Current School System	159	19.7	75	9.3	149	18.4	422	52.2

Synopsis

Early childhood education in Maryland seems to be a female-dominated profession. Only eight percent of all teachers were male and, even then, most males taught third grade. As a group, the teachers were well-educated. Eighty-three percent had taken graduate level courses with 58 percent having completed at least the Masters degree. Ninety eight percent were state certified. Seventy eight percent had tenure.

The teachers were seasoned professionals. In the total sample, 80 percent had taught at least five years and 61 percent had been teaching eleven years or more. The teachers were fairly stable with their mobility consisting more of changing grade level or school than changing school system. Among 644 teachers who had been teaching six years or more, 89 percent had taught in their current school systems six or more years and 63 percent had taught in the same school or at the same grade level the same amount of time.

2. DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

What do teachers do during the instructional day? Are they free to focus on teaching and promoting learning or do a myriad of non-instructional tasks compete for their time and energy? In programs where children's learning is the highest priority, teachers spend the time allocated to instruction promoting student learning. One form of the survey asked teachers to list all the non-instructional duties they have to perform during the instructional day.

POLICIES AND PRACTICES RELATED TO THE ASSIGNMENT OF NON-INSTRUCTIONAL TASKS

- What non-instructional duties do you have to perform during the instructional day?

CHART 19
NON-INSTRUCTIONAL DUTIES PERFORMED BY KINDERGARTEN THROUGH THIRD GRADE TEACHERS
(N=167)

Duty	*No. of Times Reported*	*No. of Teachers*
Supervising children outside the classroom	142	94
Custodial care of children	9	9
Clerical tasks	27	24
Collecting money	33	29
Attending meetings	47	28
Communicating with parents	96	55
Housekeeping chores	13	10

Synopsis

In responding to this open-ended question, teachers tended to identify either one duty or many. The non-instructional duty most teachers performed most often was supervise children in the bathroom, on the playground, and waiting for buses. Nearly one-third also reported that they communicate with parents during the instructional day. Beyond these two tasks, most teachers seemed to have few non-instructional tasks to perform during the instructional day.

3. PLANNING TIME

Implementing an appropriate and effective early learning program is based on thorough planning and preparation. ***Minimally***, it requires arranging the environment and preparing materials for active learning, planning developmentally appropriate instructional lessons at a variety of levels in a variety of content areas, and recording children's progress. All of this takes time. Two items on the teacher surveys provided information about the amount of time that is allocated for planning and the amount of time planning actually takes.

POLICIES AND PRACTICES RELATED TO PLANNING TIME

- How much weekly planning time do you have?

Amount of Time In Minutes	Frequency of Response* (N=808)	
	N	%
None	11	1.4
1-60	71	8.8
61-120	121	15.1
121-150	195	24.3
More than 150	404	50.3

*No Response=6 (.7%)

- How much time per week do you spend at home working on teaching-related tasks?

Amount of Time In Hours	Frequency of Response* (N=808)	
	N	%
None	1	0.1
Less than one	20	2.5
1-2	81	10.0
3-4	131	16.2
5 or more	570	71.0

*No Response=5 (.6%)

Synopsis

There is a wide disparity in the amount of time teachers have for planning. The range was from zero to five hours per week with about half of all teachers reporting they had more than 150 minutes of planning time per week, (the equivalent of 30 minutes per day), about 40 percent indicating that they had 1 to 2 1/2 hours and 10 percent mentioning one hour or less. That the amount of time provided for planning is insufficient is indicated by the large percentage of teachers who reported working at home. Even though the majority of teachers were seasoned professionals, 71 percent spent at least five hours a week working on teaching-related tasks at home.

4. TEACHER SUPPORT

Teachers work within an organizational structure that promotes or constrains their effectiveness. According to the literature on effective schools, building administrators are primarily responsible for providing teacher support. This involves setting high expectations for teachers' performance, conveying a sense of confidence and trust, ensuring that teachers have adequate resources, showing concern for teachers' work, recognizing teachers, strengthening their competencies, and monitoring their success in promoting student learning. Building administrators may fulfill their responsibilities in counsel or collaboration with others.

Central office personnel also have an obligation to support teachers' efforts to provide appropriate and effective learning programs. The form their support should take may include professional advice, policy clarifications, observation with feedback, and/or monitoring program effectiveness. Whether the source of teacher support is from central office personnel or building administrators, when it involves input or feedback regarding classroom practices, it should stem from a knowledge of child development and how young children learn. Five items on the surveys offered insight into the extent and nature of the support central office and building administrators provide to teachers.

POLICIES AND PRACTICES RELATED TO TEACHER SUPPORT

- How often do central office personnel review and or observe your instructional program?

Frequency of Central Office Visits In Times Per Year	Frequency of Response* (N=158)	
	N	%
Never	18	11.6
Once	52	33.5
2-4	62	40.0
5-9	13	8.4
10 or more	5	3.2

No Response=8 (.5%)

- How often are you formally evaluated by your principal?

Frequency of Evaluation	Frequency of Response* (N=808)	
	N	%
Twice a year	519	64.2
Once a year	167	20.7
Once every 2 years	72	8.9
Once every 3 years	22	2.7
Less than once every 3 years	15	1.8

No Response=13 (1.6%)

- How frequently does your principal or assistant principal visit your classroom to see what's going on?

Frequency of Visits	Frequency of Response* (N=808)	
	N	%
Everyday	17	10.8
2-3 times a week	3	1.9
3-4 times a month	1	0.6
Once a month	0	--
Several times a year	0	--
Never	127	80.4

No Response=11 (7.0%)

Synopsis

The findings suggest that teachers function in their classrooms more in isolation from principals than supervisors. Almost three-fourths indicated that central office personnel conduct program observations anywhere from two to four times a year. In contrast, while 85 percent of teachers reported being evaluated by their principals on an annual basis, 80 percent indicated that their principals never visit their classrooms "just to see what's going on".

TEACHERS' VIEWS OF POLICIES AND PRACTICES RELATED TO ADMINISTRATOR AND SUPERVISORY SUPPORT

- Which of the following statements accurately describe the central office personnel who visit your classroom? They:

Descriptor	Frequency of Response (N=167)	
	N	%
Listen to and try to address my concerns	79	47.3
Recognize my strengths and accomplishments	86	51.5
Provide useful feedback for strengthening my skills	87	52.1
Are a resource to me for program improvement	51	30.5
Know what and how young children learn	55	32.9
None of the above	15	9.0

- Which of the statements below accurately describe the nature of your relationship with your principal and/or assistant principal? (S)he:

Descriptor	Frequency of Response (N=162)			
	Applies		Doesn't Apply	
	N	%	N	%
Makes me feel that I can have a significant impact on young children	119	73.5	15	9.3
Continuously emphasizes the importance of student learning and monitors my success in promoting it	93	58.0	14	8.6
Knows what and how young children should learn	78	48.2	16	9.9
Participates in early childhood meetings that are provided for school staff	72	44.4	15	9.3
Has high expectations for my performance	106	65.4	8	4.9
Sees to it that I have the resources I need to implement the curriculum	94	58.0	9	5.6
Regularly reviews and discusses the progress of my students with me	51	31.5	35	21.6
Regularly reviews and discusses my instructional plans with me	17	10.5	85	52.5
Recognizes teachers for excellence in implementing various aspects of the program.	70	43.2	27	16.7

Synopsis

Teachers held a variety of views about the support that supervisors provide. Although no single view was prevalent, what stands out is the low percentage of teachers who felt that their supervisors know what and how young children learn. In spite of this perceived shortcoming, about 50 percent felt that they benefitted from supervisors' support. A little over half indicated that supervisors recognize their strengths and/or provided useful feedback for program improvement. A little less than half felt that supervisors were responsive to their needs and concerns.

Teachers also held a wide variety of views about the support provided by building administrators. They were most likely to view their principal as a person who establishes expectations for their performance and then gives them the freedom to get the job done. Almost three-fourths indicated that their principal makes them feel like they can have a significant impact on their students. Nearly two-thirds felt that their principal has high expectations for their performance.

About half of surveyed teachers felt that their building administrator knows how young children learn and 58 percent reported that their principal emphasizes the importance of learning and monitors teachers' success in promoting it. However, less than one-third reported that the principal regularly reviews and/or discusses the progress of their students with them. Only ten percent indicated that the principal regularly reviews and/or discusses their plans for instruction.

5. COLLEGIALITY

Teachers need stimulation and interaction in order to perfect their craft. From their peers, teachers can receive the moral support, technical assistance, and divergent perspectives needed in order to maintain the high level of performance expected of them. Working together also offsets the potentially negative effects that the physical isolation of the classroom can engender. Two items on the surveys examined the nature of the relationship among primary grade teachers.

- Which of the statements below accurately describe the interactions among primary grade teachers in your school?

Descriptor	Frequency of Response (N=167)	
	N	%
Teachers at the same grade level meet regularly to discuss the program and progress of children	113	67.7
Teachers at different grade levels meet regularly to discuss the program and progress of children	31	18.6
Teachers continuously examine the program and appraise its impact on children	61	36.5
Teachers use each other as resources for program implementation and improvement	27	16.2
None of the above	31	18.6

- Most primary grade teachers have had at least one opportunity in the last two years to observe an exemplary colleague.

  Total=167

Agree	N=13	17.8%
Disagree	N=154	92.2%

Synopsis

The findings suggest that teachers are organized the way children are organized – by grades. According to 80 percent, collaboration among teachers rarely crosses grade level boundaries. The findings further show that any sense of collegiality among teachers is minimal at best. Only about 16 to 18 percent indicated that they rely on each other for mutual assistance in program implementation or improvement. Only 36 percent reported that they work together to assess the effectiveness of the early learning program.

6. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The thinking of young children, particularly those in prekindergarten through first grade, is qualitatively different than that of older children. The methods used to educate them, therefore, must also be different. School and program-based staff development programs enable principals, teachers, and support personnel to acquire common perspectives regarding appropriate practices in the early learning years. To be effective, however, a professional development program must provide for the staff's collective participation in systematic training that is conducted often and long enough to ensure gains in understanding, skill in implementation, confidence in modification, and assessment of impact. Four items on the surveys provided information about teachers' professional development opportunities.

POLICIES AND PRACTICES REGARDING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Which of the following types of professional development activities have you participated in within the last two years?

CHART 20
TEACHERS' REPORTS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Type of Activity	*Frequency of Response (N=158)*							
	None		*Once*		*2-4*		*5 or more*	
	N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*
School-Based	14	8.6	12	7.4	59	36.4	69	43.0
Systemwide	27	16.7	18	11.1	70	43.2	40	24.7
Statewide	103	63.6	30	18.5	11	6.8	11	6.8
Program-wide, grade level, professional organization	26	16.0	18	11.1	75	46.3	36	22.2
Publisher's meeting	84	51.8	42	25.9	23	14.2	3	1.9

- I have few or no opportunity to participate in professional development meetings that are specifically geared to early childhood education.

  Total=808

Agree	N=282	34.9%
Disagree	N=526	65.1%

- Within the last three years, I have received training in the area of home school cooperation/parent involvement.

  Total=159

Agree	N=49	30.8%
Disagree	N=86	60.4%
No Response	N=14	8.8%

Synopsis

One hundred and fifty-eight teachers gave multiple responses to a question about their participation in professional development activities, suggesting that a variety of in-service opportunities are available to them. Most teachers participate in school-based training most often with only 16 percent indicating that they had not done so at least twice in a two year period and 43 percent reporting that they had done so five or more times in a similar period of time. Systemwide, program-based, and grade level in-services were also available to teachers at regular intervals.

Sixty-five percent of teachers indicated that the professional development activities in which they participated were geared to the education of young children. What such activities did not usually address, according to 60 percent of teachers, was training in the area of home-school cooperation.

TEACHERS' VIEWS OF POLICIES AND PRACTICES

- Which of the following statements characterize the professional development activities in which you have participated within the last two years?

Characteristic	Frequency of Response (N=167)	
	N	%
Each activity was a "one-shot" affair without any follow-up or requirement to use the content.	31	18.6
The topic(s) were relevant to teaching and learning at my grade level.	113	67.7
Primary grade teachers were involved in planning, implementing, and/or evaluating the activity.	87	52.1
Time was allocated during the meeting for me to practice or use the content.	51	30.5
Participation resulted in an individual or group plan for using the content.	55	32.9
I used the content in my daily instructional program.	15	9.0
My use of the content was monitored.	15	9.0
The impact of the content on teaching and learning was assessed.	20	12.0

Synopsis

Teachers' responses indicate that professional development programs provide them few opportunities to translate theory into practice. While approximately two-thirds felt that the topics of in-service activities were relevant, only about one-third reported that the training sessions provided opportunities for them to plan or prepare for classroom application. It is not surprising, therefore, that less than 10 percent of teachers indicated using the content of professional development activities and only 7 percent engaged in any assessment of its impact.

7. TEACHER DECISIONMAKING

Teacher involvement in responsible, widely-shared decisionmaking builds motivation, commitment, and interest. When teachers are excluded from the decisionmaking process and expected only to implement policies and practices made by others, their morale and self-worth as professionals is diminished. This often leads to disinterest, indifference, and lack of enthusiasm -- those qualities which mitigate against the implementation and maintenance of high quality early learning programs. Two items on the surveys assessed the extent to which teachers perceive they are involved in the decisionmaking process.

TEACHER DECISIONMAKING POLICIES AND PRACTICES

- To what extent were you involved in making decisions about each of the policies and/or practices identified below:

Policy Area		Extent of Teacher Involvement					
		A Great Deal		Some		None	
	N	N	%	N	%	N	%
Program Organization	167	108	64.7	21	12.6	38	22.7
Program Goals	158	1	.6	31	19.6	125	79.1
Grouping Practices	158	80	50.6	60	38.0	18	11.4
Curriculum	158	16	9.6	45	26.9	106	63.5
Daily Schedule	158	48	30.5	58	36.7	52	32.9
Teaching Methods	167	108	64.7	39	23.4	20	12.0
Teaching Materials	167	73	43.7	66	39.5	28	16.8
Discipline	158	69	43.7	60	38.0	29	18.3
Student Assessment	167	108	64.7	39	23.4	20	12.0
Grading Practices	167	73	43.7	39	23.4	55	32.9
Homework Policies	158	82	51.9	52	32.9	24	15.2
Parent Participation	158	15	9.5	21	13.3	122	77.2
Professional Development	158	19	12.0	44	27.8	95	60.1
Program Evaluation	167	16	9.6	37	22.2	114	68.2
Teacher Evaluation	158	2	1.3	10	6.3	146	92.4

Synopsis

There is wide variation in the extent to which teachers are involved in making decisions about early learning program policies and practices. Those areas in which 50 percent or more of teachers indicated that they had a "great deal" of decisionmaking power related to the affairs of their classroom, including grouping practices, teaching methods, assessment practices, and homework policies.

The only area external to the classroom over which a large percentage of teachers felt they had extensive control was in the organization of their early learning programs. In five of seven areas that are critical to the provision of a high quality program, less than 50 percent of surveyed teachers reported having any degree of control. These include identifying program goals, curriculum development, professional development activities, strategies for home-school cooperation, and program evaluation.

V. INVOLVING PARENTS IN THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

1. INVOLVEMENT BY DESIGN

Interacting with the home gives teachers a broader context for understanding their students and enables teachers to increase continuity between the cultures of children's homes and that of the school. Interacting with the school gives parents and/or guardians a sense of control over their children's educational destinies and gives children an added advantage in the classroom. Home-school cooperation is thus an essential ingredient of early learning programs that benefits parents, teachers, and children alike. To be effective, home-school cooperation must evolve from a structured and well-thought out plan. One form of the surveys included an item intended to determine whether home-school cooperation in early learning programs is based on a systematic plan.

POLICIES AND PRACTICES RELATED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PLAN FOR HOME-SCHOOL COOPERATION

- Which of the statements below accurately describe your school's plan for promoting home-school cooperation?

Characteristic	Frequency of Response (N=167)	
	N	%
The plan is clearly stated in writing	34	21.4
I am actively involved in carrying out the plan	28	17.7
The effectiveness of the plan is evaluated using objective data	5	3.2
This school does not have a plan for home-school cooperation	81	51.3

Synopsis

Fifty-one percent of surveyed teachers indicated that their school did not have a plan for home-school cooperation. In schools where a plan for home-school cooperation had been developed, the plan was unlikely to be stated in writing or evaluated using objective data. Only a small percentage of teachers reported that they are involved in carrying out their school's plan for home-school cooperation.

2. COMMUNICATING WITH THE HOME

Early learning program staff have an obligation to make the schooling process comprehensible to children's parents or guardians. Parents not only need to know what policies and practices characterize education in the early learning years but, also, how those policies and practices apply to their child. In addition, staff should share information with parents about their child's total development, including how the child's developmental abilities affect his or her performance in school. Five items on the surveys

examined how teachers communicate with their students' parents and what they communicate with them about.

POLICIES AND PRACTICES REGARDING HOME-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION

- Identify the three methods you use most frequently to communicate with parents and rank them in order of the frequency with which you use them.

CHART 21
METHODS USED TO COMMUNICATE WITH PARENTS
(N=167)

Method	*Rank*
Telephone calls	1
School-based meetings	4
Letters to individual parents	2
Home visits	7
Parent-teacher conferences	3
Class newsletters	6
Informal contacts at the beginning and end of the school day	5

- Most teachers at my grade level only initiate contact with the home when children are having problems in school.

Total=162

Agree	N=64	39.5%
Disagree	N=95	58.6%/
No Response	N=36	4.5%

- What percent of your students' parents have you conferenced with this year?

Percent	*Frequency of Response (N=162)*	
	N	*%*
1-20	6	3.7
21-40	10	6.2
41-60	18	11.1
61-80	14	8.6
81-99	63	38.9
100	51	30.9

- About which of the policies, practices, and programs below have you provided your students' parents information this year?

Policy, Program, Practice	Frequency of Response (N=158)	
	N	%
Early Identification and Intervention Program	20	12.7
Chapter I Program	53	33.5
Standardized testing program	58	36.7
Grouping practices	101	63.9
Grading practices	110	69.6
Grade level expectations	97	61.4
Discipline policies	118	74.7
Homework policies	114	72.1
The outcome of EIIP screening	7	4.4
Standardized test results	23	14.6
Expectations for parent involvement	17	10.8

- When discussing my students' performance with their parents, I focus on their academic achievement not their total development.

  Total=162

Agree	N=22	13.6%
Disagree	N=140	86.4%

- I provide descriptive comments about children's social, emotional, intellectual, and physical development on their report cards.

  Total=167

Agree	N=129	77.2%
Disagree	N=32	19.2%

Synopsis

Teachers maintain ongoing communication with the home as indicated by the high percentage who had conferenced with their student's parents and who reported initiating many contacts with parents each month. The methods used most frequently did not involve face-to-face interaction. Teachers most frequently communicated with parents via telephone and written correspondence. Parent-teacher conferences only ranked third.

When teachers communicate with parents about their children, most focus on the child's total development. When teachers communicate with parents about school policies and practices, they are most likely to focus on classroom expectations and practices. Sixty-one to 70 percent reported sharing information about grade level expectations and grouping and grading practices, for example. In contrast, less than 15 percent shared information with parents about the school testing program and/or expectations for parents' involvement.

3. INVOLVING PARENTS IN THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

Studies consistently show that when parents encourage and support the schooling process, children have an edge in school. Early learning programs have a responsibility to promote parental involvement in the

educational process. Parents may be involved at home or in school. Since few parents have time to volunteer in school, focusing on parents' involvement in children's learning at home has the potential to benefit the greatest number. Five items on the surveys examined how early learning programs promote parental involvement in the educational process.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT POLICIES AND PRACTICES

CHART 22
HOW PARENTS ARE INVOLVED IN THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS
(N=167)

Survey Item		*Frequency of Response*					
	N	*Agree*		*Disagree*		*No Response*	
		N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*
The focus of parent activities in the primary grades is on getting parents involved in their children's learning	167	154	92.2	9	5.4	4	2.4
Home-school cooperation includes school-based activities with an educational focus.	159	43	27.0	109	68.5	7	4.4
Home-school cooperation includes strategies for home reinforcement of learning.	159	36	22.6	116	73.0	7	4.4
Many of my students' parents participate in such school-based activities as observing in the classroom, working with children in the classroom, and attending parent education meetings.	158	69	43.7	88	55.7	1	.6

- The homework that I assign often requires children to interact with an adult in the home for its completion.

Grade	*N*	*Frequency of Response*			
		Agree		*Disagree*	
		N	*%*	*N*	*%*
K	28	25	90.0	3	10.0
1	47	40	85.1	7	14.9
2	43	27	62.8	16	37.2
3	37	21	56.7	16	43.2
Total	***155***	***113***	***72.9***	***42***	***27.1***

Synopsis

Ninety-two percent of teachers agreed that the focus of parent activities is on getting parents involved in the educational process. The findings regarding actual practice, are somewhat contradictory. While only 27 percent of one sub-sample reported that home-school cooperation includes school-based activities with an educational focus, 44% of another sub-sample indicated that students' parents are involved in the classroom

and attend parent education meetings. While less than 23 percent of one sub-sample reported that home-school cooperation includes strategies for helping parents reinforce learning at home, nearly three-fourths of another sub-sample indicated that their students' homework often requires parent-child interactions.

TEACHERS' VIEWS OF POLICIES AND PRACTICES RELATED TO HOME-SCHOOL COOPERATION

- I can carry out home-school cooperation activities without a significant investment of effort or time.

  Total=152

Agree	N=9	5.9%
Disagree	N=143	94.1%

Synopsis

Teachers recognize that planning for parent involvement takes time and energy. Given the limited amount of time that teachers have when they are not involved with children and the multiple demands that are made on the limited planning time that teachers have, it is not surprising that the home-school cooperation component of their early learning programs is often shortchanged.

VI. EVALUATING EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS

1. SCHOOL SELF-APPRAISAL

Program improvement is most effective and long lasting when staff at each school voluntarily engages in a systematic and collaborative process of self-appraisal. The purposes for self-appraisal are twofold. First, it enables staff to determine whether the policies and practices used to promote learning are appropriate in terms of their learners' developmental and individual characteristics. Second, it enables staff to assess the impact of policies and practices on learner outcomes and to evaluate learner outcomes against long-term goals for the program.

The process of self-appraisal requires staff to compile a great deal of information about their students. In order to determine whether program processes are appropriate, staff needs useful information about the developmental and individual characteristics of their students. In order to determine whether the program is effective, staff needs objective data about student attainments. In both cases, the information that is collected should provide staff with multiple perspectives on children. It should enable them to make judgements about their students, not only in terms of their intellectual development but, in terms of their development as emotional, physical, social, and cultural beings as well.

POLICIES AND PRACTICES RELATED TO SELF-APPRAISAL EVALUATION

- Who primarily evaluates the kindergarten through third grade program in your school?

Evaluators	Frequency of Response (N=158)	
	N	%
Maryland State Department of Education staff	7	4.4
Central office personnel	77	48.7
Principal	60	38.0
Teachers	60	38.0
Principal and teachers together	15	9.5
Parents	3	1.9

- In addition to yourself, who regularly monitors the performance of your students?

Office/Individual	Frequency of Response (N=162)	
	N	%
Central office personnel	10	6.2
A school administrator	80	49.3
Resource teachers from whom your students receive support	82	50.6
None of the above	16	9.9
No one else	22	13.6

- Is program evaluation based on a plan?

CHART 23
SCHOOL PLANS FOR PROGRAM EVALUATION

Survey Item		*Frequency of Response*					
	N	*Agree*		*Disagree*		*No Response*	
		N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*
This school has developed a systematic plan for determining the effectiveness of its kindergarten through third grade program.	808	484	59.9	309	38.2	15	1.9
This school's plan for evaluating the effectiveness of its kindergarten through third grade program is clearly stated in writing.	162	96	59.2	45	27.8	21	12.9
The school's plan for improving its kindergarten through third grade program is regularly monitored and discussed by teachers.	158	102	64.4	56	35.4	–	–

- Which of the following has staff in your school evaluated within the last three years in order to determine whether program practices and policies are appropriate in light of recent research in the field?

Program Policies and Practices	*Frequency of Response (N=159)*	
	N	*%*
Curriculum content/expectations	66	41.5
Assessment practices	48	30.2
Instructional methodologies	51	32.1
Grouping practices	40	25.2
School organization	24	15.1
Program goals	30	18.9
Language Arts methods	53	33.3
Basal reading program	67	42.1

- Which of the following has staff in your school evaluated within the last three years in order to determine its effectiveness, attainment, and/or accuracy?

Program Area	*Frequency of Response (N=162)*	
	N	*%*
Early learning program goals	98	63.2
EIIP screening decisions	86	55.8
EIIP interventions	84	54.9
Parenting practices	52	34.4
Retention practices	96	61.9

- Within the last three years, teachers in my school have examined the achievement of different groups of children, for example, minorities vs. whites, children from low socioeconomic backgrounds compared to those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds and boys vs. girls?

  Total=162

Agree	N=46	29.5%
Disagree	N=116	71.5%

- How have the results of program evaluations been used?

Use	Frequency of Response (N=159)	
	N	%
To modify the instructional program	72	45.3
To modify grouping practices grouping or the program organization	56	35.2
To prove program effectiveness	42	26.4
To judge the performance of individual staff members	11	6.9
To recognize staff for their accomplishments	11	6.9
None of the above	32	20.1
Not applicable, the primary program is not evaluated	29	18.2

Synopsis

One hundred and fifty-eight teachers gave 222 responses to a question about who evaluates their program suggesting that, in some schools, more than one group is involved. Almost half of the teachers indicated that their programs are evaluated by central office personnel. Only 10 percent reported that teachers and principals share the responsibility. In most schools, parents are least likely, and unlikely, to be involved in the evaluation process.

In many schools program evaluation is based on a systematic plan. Sixty percent of teachers indicated that their schools had plans and 59 percent reported that the plans were written. Written or not, 64 percent indicated that they were involved in monitoring, and discussing their schools' plans for program evaluation.

Self-appraisal is more likely to focus on learner outcomes than school processes. The only areas in which even 40 percent of surveyed teachers reported that the appropriateness of program policies and practices had recently been examined were in curriculum and the basal reading program. In contrast, at least half of surveyed teachers reported that the attainment of program goals, EIIP effectiveness, and the impact of retention policies had recently been assessed. Evaluations of program outcomes are not likely to include any study of whether the distribution of students' performance varies significantly across sub-groups.

TEACHERS' VIEWS OF POLICIES AND PRACTICES

- I view program evaluation as being both necessary and useful.

  Total=162

Agree	N=154	95.1%
Disagree	N=6	3.7%
No Response	N=2	1.2%

- Administrators in this school view program evaluation as being both necessary and useful.

  Total=159

Agree	N=142	89.3%
Disagree	N=14	8.8%
No Response	N=3	1.9%

- In this school, the purpose of program evaluation is to improve rather than to prove program effectiveness.

  Total=808

Agree	N=640	79.2%
Disagree	N=157	14.4%
No Response	N=11	13.6%

Synopsis

Teachers held positive views toward program evaluation. The majority viewed it as being both necessary and useful and most believed their school administrators did as well. Eighty percent of teachers believed that the primary purpose for evaluating their programs is to improve their effectiveness.

2. MAKING PROGRAM CHANGES

Making program changes is an integral part of the self-appraisal process. Program changes should be oriented toward improving learner outcomes in reference to program goals. If successful, they should result in the institutionalization of missing elements of quality.

Successful change must be planned and supported by central office program personnel, the principal, and teachers alike. The change process should begin with an identification of need stemming from an analysis of student data. The changes that are identified should be grounded in sound principles of child development and learning theory and/or new findings about learning in the early childhood years. Those who are expected to make the changes must be committed to doing so, willing to do so, able to do so in relation to program conditions, and encouraged and assisted in doing so. The impact of the changes must be continuously monitored and, at some point, assessed. Four items on the surveys provided information about the change process in early learning programs.

POLICIES AND PRACTICES SURROUNDING PROGRAM CHANGE

- Which of the statements below accurately describes the way changes are made in the primary program in your school?

Descriptor	Frequency of Response (N=159)	
	N	%
It is based on a careful study of objective school data.	70	44.0
It is based on the wisdom and experience of staff.	65	40.9
It is supported by findings from research.	50	31.4
It is directed by the principal without staff input.	13	2.6
It is based on central office directive without staff input.	39	24.5
None of the above.	18	11.5

- Which of the statements below accurately describes the place that innovation has in your classroom?

Role of Innovation	Frequency of Response (N=162)	
	N	%
The principal encourages me to experiment with new methods.	44	27.2
I am willing to try new methods.	116	71.6
I have implemented one or more new methods in my classroom program this year.	66	40.7
There is so much student learning for which I am accountable that I am reluctant to use new methods.	16	9.9
When I use new methods, I do so because I have to.	2	1.2

- In which of the primary program areas identified below has your school recently made changes?

Program Area	Frequency of Response (N=167)	
	N	%
Early learning program goals	33	19.8
Program organization	24	14.4
Grouping practices	41	24.6
Curriculum	57	34.1
Language arts methods	78	46.7
Student assessment	45	26.9
Program evaluation methods	28	16.8
Parenting practices	18	10.8
None of the above	18	10.8

Synopsis

The findings reveal that while teachers are amenable to change they get little support from their principals to do so. Seventy-two percent indicated a willingness to do things differently and 41 percent reported making programs changes the year the survey was conducted. Only 27 percent of teachers, however, indicated that

the impetus for change stemmed from their principals. When change occurred it was more likely to be a central office mandate than a principal directive.

Change, when it occurs, is most likely to take place on a school-by-school basis. Although teachers' responses indicate that some changes have been made in early learning programs, overall, the changes that have been made are neither substantial nor widespread. According to teachers, for example, some changes have been made in language arts methods, curriculum, student assessment practices, and grouping practices.

Findings about the sources of and rationale for change are particularly disconcerting. Data about the school and its student population are not likely to be the source of change. Nor are changes, when made, likely to be supported by findings from research. If this is really the case, then the very premises on which effective change is built are not premises that apply to the change process in early learning programs.

VII. SUCCEEDING IN LEARNING

1. HOW ARE OUR YOUNGEST STUDENTS DOING?

The primary purpose of schooling is learning. The primary criteria for determining the effectiveness of early learning programs, therefore, are learner outcomes. In effective programs two major outcomes are documented. First, the overall level of performance is sufficiently high to indicate that most children have mastered critical curriculum objectives. Second, the distribution of performance does not vary significantly across the major subsets of the student population, for example, children from low socioeconomic backgrounds perform at a level comparable to that of children from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, minorities perform at a level comparable to that of whites, and the performance of children, by gender, does not vary significantly. Seven items on the surveys provided data for drawing preliminary conclusions about the effectiveness of early learning programs in the state's public schools.

TEACHERS' REPORTS OF STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE

CHART 24
PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN PERFORMING UNSATISFACTORILY
SPRING 1987

Percentage of Children Performing Unsatisfactorily	*Frequency of Response (N=808)*	
	N	*%*
0	74	9.2
1-19	500	61.9
20-39	149	18.4
40% or more	63	7.8

- What percentage of your students are reading below grade level?

CHART 25
PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN READING BELOW GRADE LEVEL
SPRING 1987

Percentage of Children Reading Below Grade Level	*Frequency of Response (N=808)*	
	N	*%*
0	135	16.7
1-19	323	40.0
20-39	136	16.8
40% or more	206	25.5

- What percentage of your students are reading above grade level?

CHART 26
PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN
READING ABOVE GRADE LEVEL
SPRING 1987

Percentage of Children Reading Above Grade Level	*Frequency of Response (N=808)*	
	N	*%*
0	144	17.8
5-19	218	27.0
20-39	110	13.6
40% or more	131	16.2

CHART 27
TEACHERS' REPORTS OF LEARNER OUTCOMES BY SUBSET

Survey Item		*Frequency of Response*					
	N	*Agree*		*Disagree*		*No Response*	
		N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*
In this school, children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds usually achieve at a lower level than their more advantages peers.	159	109	68.6	48	30.2	2	1.3
In my class, children who are more advanced in September are usually more advanced in June.	167	149	89.2	16	9.6	2	1.2
In my class, children who are behind in September are usually behind in June.	162	91	56.3	71	43.7	–	
The primary program in this school is implemented so that all children can meet with success.	808	644	79.7	161	19.9	3	.4

Synopsis

Eighty percent of all teachers believed that their early learning programs are being implemented so that all children can meet with success. Only one-fourth reported that 20 percent or more of their class was performing unsatisfactorily. However, almost 43 percent – over twice as many – indicated that 20 percent or more of their class was reading below grade level. Apparently, for many early elementary grade teachers, reading on grade level is not a criterion for measuring of school success.

Sixty-nine percent of teachers indicated that children from higher socioeconomic backgrounds usually perform better than their less advantaged peers. Almost 90 percent reported that children who are ahead in September are still ahead in June. This finding suggests that as early as the primary grades, academic performance favors children who have an edge to begin with. The good news is that at least 44 percent of teachers indicated that children who are behind at the beginning of the school year catch up by the end.

2. *RETENTION*

Schools detain children in the same grade for an additional year in order to prevent their ultimate failure. According to research findings, retention does not generally improve students' subsequent performance. In control-group studies, children recommended for retention, but advanced to the next level, ended up doing as well or better than their non-promoted peers. On the other hand, children who had been retained demonstrated more social regression and school misconduct, had higher stress levels, and lower self-esteem. These findings raise questions about the use of retention as a policy for bestowing educational benefits. Three items on the surveys provided information about the reasons why teachers retain children and the extent to which retention issued as an early learning program policy.

RETENTION POLICIES AND PRACTICES

- I retain children who fail to meet grade level expectations.

  Total=162

Agree	N=83	51.2%
Disagree	N=64	39.5%
No Response	N=15	9.3%

- I retain children for reasons other than their failure to meet grade level expectations.

Grade		*Frequency of Response* (N=158)*	
	N	*N*	*%*
K	29	24	82.8
1	43	30	69.8
2	35	25	71.4
3	35	17	48.6

*No response N=16 (10.1%)

- What percentage of the children in your class will you retain this year?

Percent to be Retained	*Frequency of Response (N=808)*	
	N	*%*
0	390	48.3
1-10	361	44.7
11-30	48	5.9
31 or more	9	1.1

Synopsis

Teachers' responses suggest that retention is not a widespread practice in early learning programs. When asked how many students they would retain the year the survey was conducted, almost half of all teachers reported that they would not retain any. Forty-five percent indicated that they would retain 10 percent or less.

Children are retained for reasons other than those related to achievement, although this practice varies significantly by grade level. Kindergarten teachers are most likely to retain children for non-academic reasons and third grade teachers are least likely to do so.

It was surprising to note that anywhere from 50 to 80 percent of teachers at all grade levels used criteria other than achievement to make retention decisions about children. It was also surprising to find such a high percentage of kindergarten teachers viewing retention as a viable option, particularly in view of the fact that in Maryland, kindergarten attendance is voluntary, not required by law.

3. INGREDIENTS OF SUCCESS AND FAILURE

Individual, home, and program variables all enter into the formula for school success. In order for early learning programs to be effective, staff must feel that those dimensions of the child, the child's home, and the program that make the most difference are within their purview. In addition, from staff's perspective, program variables must weigh most heavily. Teachers must believe that high quality school experiences tailored to children's individual strengths and needs can have a powerful impact on what children learn. Four items on the surveys provided insight into those variables that teachers view as being most significant in the formula for children's school success.

THE INGREDIENTS OF SCHOOL SUCCESS

- To what extent do home, school, and individual variables contribute to the formula for school success?

CHART 27
THE AVERAGE PERCENTAGE TO WHICH HOME, SCHOOL AND INDIVIDUAL VARIABLES CONTRIBUTE TO CHILDREN'S SCHOOL SUCCESS
(N=167)

Variable	Percent of Contribution		
	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Parental support/involvement	0	99.0	21.2
Child's aptitude/ability	0	60.0	21.6
Child's effort and motivation	0	75.0	22.0
Curriculum and methodologies	0	60.0	14.0
Teacher expectations	0	70.0	20.1
		Total	98.9%

- Which of the factors below contribute to children's success in school? Rank five in order of the importance of their contribution.

CHART 28
FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO CHILDREN'S SUCCESS IN SCHOOL
(N=162)

Factor	*Rank*
Socioeconomic level	4
Parents' educational level	5
Home support for education	2
Student ability	1
Student maturity	3
Student motivation to learn	6
Regular school attendance	8
Instruction	7
Adequate school resources	9
Preschool participation	9

- What factors contribute to children's failure to succeed in school? Rank five in order of the importance of their contribution.

CHART 29
FACTORS THAT INTERFERE WITH CHILDREN'S SUCCESS IN SCHOOL
(N=167)

Factor	*Rank*
Socioeconomic level	4
Parents' educational level	6
Lack of home support for education	2
Low student ability	1
Immaturity	3
Lack of motivation to learn	7
Poor school attendance	5
Inadequate instruction	9
Inadequate school resources	10
Lack of preschool participation	8

- Which program factors identified below keep you from adequately meeting the needs of all students? Rank five in order of the extent to which they interfere with your effectiveness.

CHART 30
PROGRAM VARIABLES THAT INTERFERE
WITH TEACHERS' EFFECTIVENESS IN THE CLASSROOM

Factor	*Rank*
Lack of clear goals and priorities	14
Too many goals and priorities	2
Conflicting goals and priorities	12
Excessive specification of methods, materials, and time allocations	4
Inadequate planning time	3
Use of inappropriate methods of instruction	17
Inappropriate placement of students by previous teachers	11
Inadequate administrative support	16
Inadequate professional development	15
Inadequate communication among teachers	13
Ineffective program organization	9
Insufficient human resources	5
Insufficient material resources	8
Insufficient fiscal resources	10
Class size	1
Insufficient instructional time	7
Too many interruptions to instruction	6

Synopsis

According to teachers, the same factors that contribute to children's success in school, when missing, contribute to their failure. These factors lie outside the school and within the home and children themselves. The four variables that teachers identified as being most critical to children's success in school, in rank order, are ability, home support for education, maturity, and socioeconomic level. Teachers identified the absence of the same four variables in the same order as contributing to children's lack of success. For both successful and unsuccessful children, teachers viewed school-related variables as being least important.

When asked to indicate the extent to which they thought home, school, teacher, and individual variables matter, teachers assigned about equal importance to all factors except curriculum and methodology. Curriculum and methodology were viewed as being somewhat less important than home support for education, teacher expectations, and children's ability and motivation to learn. Curriculum and instruction also ranked low as a factor preventing teachers from adequately meeting children's needs. From a list of 17 school-related variables, those that ranked highest as impediments to teachers' effectiveness were class size, too many goals and priorities, inadequate planning time, too much specification of methods, materials, and time allocations, and insufficient human resources. Lack of administrative support ranked sixteenth and the use of inappropriate methods of instruction ranked last.

What is interesting is that although teachers feel they are responsible for what children learn, they tend not to see the link between what children learn and the methods that are used to promote learning. On almost every single survey item in this category, methods of teaching and learning were viewed as being least important in the formula for children's school success.

VIII. EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS: STATEWIDE POLICIES AND PRACTICES

In A Place Called School, John Goodlad wrote that while schools themselves differ, the process of schooling is everywhere the same (p. 264). The regularities of school emerge time and time again, regardless of differences in school location and staff or student characteristics. This study was motivated by the desire to identify those regularities or conventions of early learning programs that make them the same throughout the state. The discovery of these program-to-program likenesses can help determine whether education in the primary grades is of the uniformly high quality that we want it to be.

For the purposes of this investigation, policies and practices were considered conventions of early learning program grades if the frequency of teachers' responses was 75 percent or higher or if, according to teachers' ranking, they ranked at the top. Teachers' views were considered common perspectives by the same criteria. Those "commonplaces" that make public schooling the same for young learners throughout the state are identified by a category in the following section.

LEARNING IN KINDERGARTEN THROUGH THIRD GRADE

Program Goals

- Goals and objectives are clearly stated in writing and communicated to teachers.
- Goals and objectives are developed without teacher input.
- Teachers and principals agree on what the goals should be: to help children find satisfaction and success in learning, to help them acquire basic skills in language and mathematics, and to help them build a positive self-concept.
- Teachers and principals agree on what the least important goals should be: to help children acquire basic moral values, to promote their physical development, and to help them develop an appreciation for and interest in the arts.

Program Organization

- Programs are organized by grades. Each grade consists of classes formed on a heterogeneous basis.
- Within classes, children are grouped on the basis of ability.
- Children are grouped for reading instruction on the basis of ability.
- Teachers believe that the way in which the program is organized enables them to effectively meet their students' needs.

Equity and Opportunity

- Average class size at all grade levels is 22-23 with significant variation across programs.
- The average number of hours in a kindergarten child's instructional day is 2 hours and 45 minutes. The average number of hours in a first through third grader's instructional day is 6 1/2.
- In kindergarten, approximately 55 percent of the instructional day is allocated to math and language arts, and 15 percent to physical education and the arts.
- In first through third grades, approximately 47 percent of the instructional day is allocated to math and language arts and 15 percent to physical education and the arts.
- Ten percent or more of each instructional day is allocated to routine activities.
- By third grade, managing children begins to infringe on instructional time.
- Teachers believe they are primarily responsible for what children learn and their success in learning.
- Teachers hold different but high expectations for children.

Curriculum

- Systemwide curricula are available in language arts, math, social studies, and science.
- Local school system curricula are used as the basis for making decisions about learning and teaching in the areas of reading, math, and social studies, and science. In reading, commercially developed teacher's guides are used along with local school system curriculum as the basis for making instructional decisions.
- Teachers are uncertain about how the local school system curriculum is to be used.

Continuity of Learning

- The pace at which children learn is determined by their interests, ability, and success in learning.
- Teachers thoroughly review what has previously been taught before introducing new learning.

Learning in Developmentally Appropriate Ways

- Reading, writing, and math are taught as separate subjects.
- Teachers report that implementation of the curriculum requires an integrated approach.
- Children learn through concrete experience with pencil and paper tasks increasing significantly from kindergarten to second grade.
- Teachers report that their students have many opportunities to learn through exploration and experimentation.
- Kindergarten children have many opportunities to learn through social interaction. Learning through social interaction decreases significantly from kindergarten to second grade.

Learning By Instruction

- Phonics instruction decreases significantly from kindergarten to third grade, being replaced by a greater emphasis on reading comprehension.
- Writing is taught using a process approach.
- Pencil and paper tasks tend to dominate math practice.
- Social studies and science are primarily taught through direct instruction using films, filmstrips, and pictures.
- The focus of music is primarily on singing with little attention given to movement, music appreciation, or music theory.
- The focus of art is primarily on drawing and "cutting and pasting" with little attention given to art methods and materials, art as a form of self-expression, and art appreciation.
- The focus of physical education is recreational with little attention given to the development of children's physical abilities.
- Approximately 5-30 minutes each day is allocated to physical activity.
- Classroom experiences in art, music, and physical education are supplemented by weekly experiences provided by resource teachers.

Self-Directed Learning

- Teacher-directed instruction dominates each child's instructional day.
- Self-directed learning is limited to involving children in evaluating what they have learned.

Responding to Individual Needs and Differences

- A combination of teacher observation and analysis of children's classroom performance is most frequently used to identify differences among children.
- Grouping strategies within the classroom are used to respond to the needs of children who are more advanced or have learning problems. Human and material resources are generally not provided to help classroom teachers address the needs of more able children.
- Parents and paraprofessionals are used for more often than professionals to provide additional support to children with learning problems.
- The instructional methods used by resource teachers who provide supplementary support to children with learning problems are the same as those used by teachers in the regular classroom program.
- Teachers feel that the organization of their program enables them to challenge children who are more advanced.
- A broad array of comprehensive health and student support services are available, but rarely to the extent needed. Particularly lacking are ESOL teachers and family support services such as parent workers, social workers, and attendance monitors.

Assessing Young Learner's Development

- Teachers are informed about the Early Identification and Intervention Program (EIIP).
- Teachers' involvement in implementing the intervention phase of EIIP is limited.
- Kindergarten teachers tend to use EIIP screening results to identify children's specific strengths and weaknesses.
- Children are informed about the criteria by which their performance in the classroom will be judged.
- Assessments of children's classroom performance focus on all aspects of their development.
- Teacher observation and teacher judgement play an important role in assessing children's progress and performance.
- The tests that teachers administer to children are curriculum-referenced.
- A wide variety of pre- and post-tests are administered to first through third grade children in language arts and math.
- Teachers rely on recommendations from the preceding year's teacher to determine children's initial placement in reading.
- Curriculum-referenced test results are used to identify children's individual strengths and needs.
- Teachers do not believe that norm-referenced tests are a valid assessment of children's strengths and weaknesses. According to teachers, because norm-referenced tests are not matched to the curriculum they are not a valid assessment of what children have been taught.

TEACHING KINDERGARTEN THROUGH THIRD GRADE

Teacher Characteristics

- Teachers are predominantly female. They already have or are pursuing a Master's Degree.
- Teachers are certified and tenured with at least six years of professional experience.

Non-Instructional Tasks

- The non-instructional tasks teachers perform during the instructional day are minimal and primarily consist of supervising children.

Planning Time

- At least two hours of planning time are provided each week.
- Teachers spend at least three hours a week working on school-related tasks at home.

Teacher Support

- Central office personnel conduct on-site review of teachers' programs at least once a year.
- Teachers are formally evaluated by their principals at least once a year.
- Principals do not monitor what goes on inside of early learning program classrooms.

Collegiality

- Collaboration among teachers for the purposes of program planning, implementation, and/or evaluation does not cross grade level boundaries.
- Teachers do not rely on each other as resources for program implementation and improvement.
- Teachers have no opportunities to strengthen their skills through observation of exemplary colleagues.

Professional Development

- A wide variety of in-service opportunities are available to teachers. School-based activities are most common.
- Teachers participate in at least two school-based professional development meetings each year.
- Teachers believe they are expected to use the content of professional development activities, but don't. Their use of the content is neither monitored nor evaluated.

Teacher Decisionmaking

- There is wide variation in the extent to which teachers are involved in making program decisions.
- Teachers are somewhat involved in making decisions about the affairs of their classrooms such as grouping and assessment practices, teaching methods, and homework policies.
- Teachers are not involved in making decisions about program goals, curriculum, parent participation practices, and methods of teacher evaluation.

INVOLVING PARENTS IN THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

Planned Involvement

- Home-school cooperation practices are not based on a school or program plan.

Communicating With Parents

- Teachers most frequently communicate with parents in ways that do not involve face-to-face interaction: by telephone and written correspondence.
- Teachers share information with parents about their child's total development, both in writing and through parent-teacher conferences.
- Teachers usually share information with parents about grade level expectations and discipline policies. Teachers usually do not share information with parents about the testing program or test results.

Involving Parents In The Educational Process

- Teachers believe that the focus of parent activities is on getting parents involved in the educational process but the extent to which activities that do so are actually carried out is limited.
- The extent to which parents are involved in children's homework decreases significantly from kindergarten to third grade. Kindergarten and first grade teachers usually assign homework that requires parent-child interaction.
- Teachers believe that plans for home-school cooperation require a significant investment of effort and time.

EVALUATING EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS

Self-Appraisal

- Teachers view program evaluation as both useful and necessary and believe their principals do as well.
- Teachers believe that the purpose of program evaluation should be to improve program effectiveness.
- Early learning programs are more likely to be evaluated by central office personnel than school staff, including principals, teachers, or principals and teachers together.
- Schools do not generally evaluate program policies and practices in terms of their appropriateness for young learners.
- Evaluating program outcomes and/or the impact of program policies and practices is not an activity in which all schools routinely engage.

Making Program Changes

- Early learning programs are not likely to undergo significant changes; they are relatively resistant to change.

PROMOTING SUCCESS IN LEARNING

Success For All

- Teachers believe that the primary program in their school is being implemented so that all children can meet with success.
- Children who are more advanced in September are usually more advanced in June.
- Over half of teachers indicated that children who are behind in September are usually behind in June.

Retention

- Kindergarten teachers retain children for reasons other than their failure to meet grade level expectations.
- Teachers retain ten percent or less of their class each year.

Ingredients of Success and Failure

- According to teachers, the same three factors that contribute to children's school success, when missing, contribute to their failure. These factors are student ability, home support for education, and student maturation.
- Teachers rank quality of instruction near the bottom as a factor contributing to children's school success or failure.
- Program variables that teachers most frequently view as impediments to their effectiveness include class size, too many goals and priorities, and inadequate planning time.
- Teachers view instructional methods as the variable that is least likely to promote or interfere with their effectiveness in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

The information in this report on early learning programs in Maryland's public schools can be used in a variety of ways. As a data base for determining the quality of education in the primary grades three approaches are possible. First, those policies and practices that have been identified as regularities of the early grades can be analyzed in order to identify overall strengths and weaknesses. Second, they can be analyzed in reference to what is missing but needs to be in place in order to ensure that all programs meet a common standard of quality.

Finally, findings in the body of the report can be scrutinized to determine the extent of variation among programs. While differences among programs or between grades may only be in degrees, wide degrees of variation can manifest themselves as unequal educational opportunities for children. The issue, then, is the degree of variation that can be tolerated without jeopardizing all children's opportunity to participate in a quality program.

The greatest challenge lies ahead. It is the state's responsibility to ensure that all young children attend a public school in which their initial experiences are both appropriate and effective. The next step is deciding what the state must do in order to make this happen.

APPENDIX

ELEMENTS OF APPROPRIATE AND EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN IN KINDERGARTEN THROUGH THIRD GRADE*

1. Clearly articulated goals that focus on all aspects of development.

2. A curriculum, aligned with school or program goals and coordinated across grade levels, that clearly identifies essential objectives for learning that are within children's developmental capabilities to attain.

3. Use of learning and teaching methods that are compatible with children's holistic, experiential, and active style of learning.

4. Curricular and instructional differentiation within the regular classroom program to address children's individual strengths and needs without tracking or labeling them.

5. A daily schedule that provides for a balance of educational experiences in basic skills, social studies, and science, physical education, and the arts.

6. On-going evaluation of children's development and school progress primarily through observation and by maintaining a portfolio of their products over time. The use of curriculum and criterion-referenced tests to assess children's mastery of essential objectives for learning.

7. A strong home-school cooperation component that focuses on involving parent's in children's education, particularly at home.

8. Staff training that is conducted often and long enough to enable all program personnel to gain information about the processes involved in implementing an appropriate and effective educational program in the early grades, and that enables teachers to increase their skill in implementing an appropriate and effective program.

9. Self-appraisal that uses information about all aspects of children's development and school progress to evaluate program processes and outcomes in reference to program/school goals.

**Synthesized from the literature on effective elementary schools and appropriate education in the primary grades.*

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